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Meg:

A Pastoral

Isabel Barnes Gustafson.

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MEG: A PASTORAL.

AND

OTHER POEMS.

BY

ZADEL BARNES GUSTAFSON.

BOSTON:
LEE AND SHEPARD, PUBLISHERS.
NEW YORK:
CHARLES T. DILLINGHAM.
1879.

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TO

Axel Carl Johan Gustafson,

IN TOKEN OF

His Wife's Love.

PREFACE.

THE three poems, "Meg, a Pastoral," the tribute to "William Cullen Bryant," and "Not Peace, but a Sword, a Fantasy," are new, and appear for the first time in print in this volume.

The other verses are such selection from my previous work as I have been led to hope — from the friendly comment of the press at the time of their first appearance, and from the opinions and advice of friends — might find a second welcome.

It will be seen, from the few notes of explanation and acknowledgment appearing in Appendix, that I am indebted for the privilege of making this collection to the courtesy of Messrs. Harper & Brothers, and the editors of various other periodicals.

ZADEL B. GUSTAFSON.

5 LINDEN AVE., BOSTON HIGHLANDS, MASS.,
September, 1878.

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MEG: A PASTORAL.

THE WILLOW.

MEG's at the window, leaning out.
  Meg is beautiful, very:
A smile just blooms into dimples about
  A mouth like a double cherry.

For, see! beyond the meadow-stile
  Her tall, broad-shouldered lover
Is coming down the foot-worn aisle
  That winds through reddening clover.

Trimming an osier wand he comes:
  Is it for that he lingers?

Low throbbings, faint as of fairy drums,
As round him the honey-bee wheels and hums,
Reverberate over
The bee-beset clover.
Absorbed he seems, and slowly he comes:
The while in supple fingers
The willow he bends,
He covertly sends
A critical glance at the rich young face,
That in simple shrine of a rustic bower,
With radiant eyes and tropical bloom,
Flames out of the mellow, delicate gloom
Like a single exquisite cardinal-flower.
The willow he bends, and his loitering pace
Gains subtly an increase of indolent grace:
For he sees, well pleased, the smile fading out,
And the dimples dissolve in a quiver of doubt;
Looks up at last with a start and a smile: —

"Why, Meg! pretty love, were you there all the while?"

And then, as under the window he stands,
He murmurs, with seeming of honest surprise,
"But why, scarlet lily, are tears in your eyes?
And why do they tremble, those beautiful hands?"
Then, out of his negligence, swift as a flash
He clasps her hands, and his silky mustache
Just brushes her cheek: her shy mouth feels his,
Pressed close in a lingering, passionate kiss.
And half she restrains him with downcast eye,
While yielding in heavenly modesty.

"See! here is a wand:
To get it for you
I dethroned a young bird,
Its nest cut in two;

For the longest lithe wand
Its meshes ran through.
Such a tumult of wings,
And confusion of cries,
As they twittered and flew, —
The pretty brown things, —
And kept me in view
With their startled black eyes!

"But's what's a bird's-nest,
When a lover's in quest
Of a gift for a sweetheart like you?
'Twas a pity; but, then,
They'll build it again,
And forget all their silly ado.
Pray, sweet, guard it well:
They say there's a spell
In the willow, to keep lovers true."

She, receiving it, sighs,
Yet so softly replies,
There scarce seems reproach in the words:
"I thank you, dear Hugh;
But I'm sorry it grew
In the nest of those dear little birds."

Stalwart Hugh, as he stands beneath,
Handsome, indolent, gay,
In silence looks through the jasmine-wreath
At Meg in a curious way;
Suffers his gaze to deepen and burn
Ere he softly pleads, "Give me in return
One bit of your jasmine spray."

Leaning to give it, a sudden red,
Deep as the flame of the cardinal-flower,
Glows in her cheek; for she hears a tread,

Even, elastic, firm as the beat
Of a loyal heart in a bosom sweet,
Coming! To Meg in her jasmine bower
A hat is raised from a sun-browned head.
The forehead uncovered is white and strong:
The rich bass murmur of harvest-song,
Just broken for one grave smile, goes on.
Hugh, frowning, "So that is your Corydon!"
"Nay, that's not his name: he's only John."

THE DANCE.

Annelind, fair coquette and belle,
Taps her foot to the music's swell;
Calls to Meg with a nonchalant air,
Inwardly piqued to see how fair
This farmer's daughter in simple gown,
With modest maidenly eyes cast down,—

Verily almost as fair as she,
Heiress of wealth and pedigree.

"Dear Meg, pray fasten this on my arm:
The clasp goes thus in the pendent charm.
'Tis a pretty bawble, something new,
Out of the common; its giver, too,
An uncommonly handsome fellow, — Hugh.
You awkward thing! in your haste you hurt.
They say, — just fix this loop in my skirt, —
They say that he's an enchanting flirt."

"Sweet Annelind, hear me
One moment, I beg!
'Tis beneath one so fair
To be jealous of Meg.
She has handsome black eyes,
And a prettyish air;

Her ankle is trim
For a dairy-maid's leg.
But she's only a rustic:
I care not a peg
Who wins or who wears
Such a field-flower as Meg.

"Give me the queen lily, —
The lily that grows
On a forehead that seems
The white arch of repose.
The dark blowzy curl
Of an apple-cheeked girl
May charm for an hour;
But Annelind's eyes,
Her smiles and her sighs,
Have permanent power."

With a toss of blonde tresses,
And lip that denies
What her eye half confesses,
She coldly replies:—
"Methinks 'twere scarce prudent
To love a gay student:
All scholars are false."
"Nay, Annelind!—all?"
Hugh, laughing, breathes low,
"One exception, you know"—
"Hush! there is the waltz!"
She turns with a glide,—
It is Meg at her side;
Flashes downward a glance,—
"Don't dance the round dance?
Shy little brown mouse!
Well, then, here's my shawl,—
You'll keep it; and this,

You dear thing, for a kiss."
And they wheel to the Strauss.

With laughter and jest, and the clinking of glass,
The dancers from dancing to banqueting pass.
Fair Annelind, dainty and cool coquette,
Holding her moth in gay dalliance yet,
Turns for a moment to murmur "How nice!"
To a pair of mustachios presenting an ice.
That instant Hugh's glance, mating slyness and ease,
Goes questing with lilt like a leaf's on the breeze;
Then flashes and settles. With graceful regret
Hugh yields to mustachios his place by coquette,
With a flattering air of submissive defeat,
And "Thanks for a favor short-lived, but so sweet!"

For "Phyllis" is standing, and "Corydon"
Right gallantly putting her wrappings on.
"Confound him, the fellow! he has an eye
Like a star, set deep in his white brow's sky:
Against her mantle his large brown hand,
Through labor's mask, shows the mould of command.
Can I be jealous?" — with self-mocking sigh, —
"And of this homespun tiller of land?
She will not look up. But I saw her start:
She knows I am coming: her soft girl's heart
Flutters just now like a frightened bird.
Ah, John! talk on; but she hears not a word.
How she *can* hearken this John shall see. —
Dear Meg, come out in the garden with me.
The air's like a bath of eau de cologne;
And there, love, you know, we can be all alone."

To John her look is like evening light,
So gentle, so clear, as she says "Good-night,"
And turns with Hugh; while a rising glow
Makes rosy the pale of an hour ago.
"God bless her, and give her life's very best!"
Is the prayer love prays in John's simple breast;
"For the best for her, whatever it be,
As I love her truly, is best for me."

IN THE GARDEN.

Out in the garden, through perfume and dew
Of flower-dusky borders, she walks with Hugh.
He softly whispers a hundred sweet things,
More light than the dust on butterfly-wings;
Jestingly envies her knight of the plough;
Breathes every thing fond, save an honest vow.
He pauses, — for here is the garden-gate, —
And bends to kiss her; but she, crying "Wait!"

Shrinks from him swiftly a step, and then straight
Lifts her young face, so the moon risen late
Shines on it full. Hugh, looking, is dumb.
"The moment for truth between us is come.
I am not learned: I could count on my hand
The things in books which I understand.
But the heart is apt: in an hour it learns much.
Nay!—never again will I suffer your touch!"

Her low, gentle voice was never more clear;
And her look is the flash of Ithuriel's spear:—
"To you it was charm for an idle hour
To win or to wither the poor 'field-flower,'
And boast of it! Ah! yet it might be true,
It could love and be loved by nobler than you.
I speak not in scorn: for scorning is small;
Would be lost in the place where loving was
all.

And you see, not in pride, 'tis falsest shame
Deems trust is folly, and love a blame.
Oh! know this for truth, — not pride and not fear
Can breathe in love's heaven-pure atmosphere.
It is more than willow will keep love true,
And less. Oh, God teach you! and farewell,
Hugh!"

She turns, and is gone. Through the meadow-grass
That leans before her to let her pass,
Through open field, and through maple-shade,
He watches her mantle glimmer and fade.

THE COTTAGE.

At home, Meg's father, the Farmer Brown,
Sits dozing over the news from town.
The mother sleeps, and the house is still.
It might be a moonbeam crossing the sill,

Meg enters so lightly in her white gown,
And just at the farmer's knees sinks down;
Twice whispers, "Father!" He starts, and stands
Roused, but hushed by her trembling hands,
And lifts her panting, while brief amaze
Deepens to pain in his loving gaze.

He sits, and draws her upon his knees:
She is shaken and cold and wan, he sees;
Her sweet dark eyes they are strained and wild.
"Father, you love me!—you love your child!"
She yearningly murmurs close to his ear.
He leans his cheek to the dear brown head.
"Then take me this night away from here:
Let me go to my aunt in my mother's stead."
A moment's silence: the father's heart
Plunges as though it would burst apart.

"Has any one — wronged thee?" he moans at last.

"I am thy father: thou knowest well
I will love thee, whatever thou hast to tell."
A moment his darling clasps him fast;
Then lifts, with lovely passionate grace,
Her clear eyes full to her father's face.
The beaming looks of those beautiful eyes,
They tell him his darling is pure and true
As any daisy that drinks the dew;
For the pure in heart in the heart are wise.

"But, father," — the sweet eyes droop again, —
"There has been blindness, and there is pain.
To-night it seemed as if life and death,
With all they mean, in one burning breath
Made me a flame to shrivel a lie;
But, oh! in that burning I seemed to die.

It took all my strength to turn away;
For all at once I longed so to stay,
I could have cast myself at his feet,
And craved forgiveness, and found it sweet.

"Oh! how could this be, when I knew him base?"
In piteous shame she hides her face.
Then these words, pantingly breathed in his ear, —
"I had trust in myself; but now — I fear,
If I stay, perhaps I could not — keep right.
I would try; but, father, those words you say, —
You know, in the mornings, when you pray, —
'Lead us not,' and, 'From evil deliver!'"
The white locks down on the brown waves quiver:
"Amen! My darling shall go to-night."

No vision of scythe and ripe-bending grain!
Ah! more than his stock, or than harvest gain,
Is his innocent darling's need to him;
And his heart is grateful unto the brim.
He rises, and lays his darling down
In the old chair's shadow broad and brown:
And the wide white moonbeam over the floor,
Following, waits at the bedroom-door,
As if it were set to keep ward and watch;
There climbs the dark panel, and gilds the latch.

As mothers, lovingest martyrs of earth,
Sink into swift sleep betwixt pangs of birth,
So, almost between the beats of her heart,
Meg's eyelids droop, and her sweet lips part;
From their strenuous clasp her fingers release,
And passion fades dreamlessly into peace.

The father and mother come softly out:
One look at their child, and one at each other;
Then he to the door, and the pale-faced mother
Nods with a smile; for the loving are strong.
She gathers her darling's garments about,
And, folding them, hums an old cradle-song.

Then the sound of hoofs and wheels, and a neigh.
Meg starts: "O mother!" she cries, and is pressed
In speechless embrace to that mother's breast.
Each feels the full pledge of the mute caress,
And of meeting hands, in the change of dress.
Then all is ready: the cloud-dappled gray
Flashes over with red as they ride away.

The dawn-flushes deepen to sunrise gold,
And the mother's tasks for the morn are o'er.

Farther and higher, till many hours old,
The sun beats down at the cottage-door.
She had touched the keys of the ancient spinet,
Only to pause with a shivering chill:
Far off were those days when its chords were sweet,
And she had kept time with her dancing feet.
Up stairs the twitter of Meg's brown linnet,
A trill and flutter of birds at the sill;
But the day is long, and the cottage still,
With no step or voice of her darling in it.

So deep in the breadth of the farmer's chair
The mother sits sewing with listless air.
As the clock ticks on, and the needle flies,
Comes often a mist in the mother's eyes;
While scenes of the past with the present seem
To mingle, and move in pathetic dream.

She starts: for she sees a long shadow pass;
Hears the soft swishing of steps in the grass.
"Is't father so soon? nay, it must be John,"
She thinks, as her eyes from the glaring sun
She shades with one hand, and the door sets wide.
Not "father," nor "John," who in youth's fresh pride,
Most royally fashioned of Nature's grace,
Stands on the threshold with uncovered head,
Flashing strong eyes in the mother's pale face.
Pale was her face; but her eyes were burning.
"So thou art the man! and thou comest to *me!*"
She thought: but she caught, as the stranger smiled,
Some look in his face of her long-lost child;

And through her dumb anger smote a hot yearning, —
"My boy, had he lived, might have looked like thee."
And thus, with mixed meanings that did amaze,
She pierced him with long and hungering gaze,
That marked the firm limbs, the breadth, strength, and height,
The brow and eye splendor, the locks thick and bright,
The reverent air in which mothers delight.

Then, slowly and coldly averting her eye,
She turned. "Is your daughter within?" he said.
"My daughter is with the sick or the dead,
As God may decide," was the stern reply.
He blushed as one smitten: his very brow

Grew dark with that blush as he spake more low: —

"Will you tell her I came to say 'Good-by'?"

"Good-by!" The scene of the morning came back, —

Her child's tender heart on love's fiery rack;

Her sweet, patient darling, her poor wounded dove!

And here was the light-tongued assassin of love!

She turned on him, kindling with blinding scorn:

The threshold was vacant, the stranger gone;

And the sun beat down on the glistening stone.

THE SILENT WOOING.

Oh! pleasant it is from the wind and snow

To enter the hearth-fire's cheerful glow;

To change the stars of the cold winter's night

For eyes that beam with love's welcoming light;

To see the fresh plate and the wholesome fare,
And the cordial hands that push forward the chair.
John thinks, with a smile and a silent tongue,
(For thought with him is so swift, that speech
Is apt to lag blushing just out of reach,)
That "home" is all poets have dreamed or sung.
"And 'home' — will it ever be mine to say 'home'?
Will she whom I love, when I ask her, come?"

Meg gently comes near, and offers the bread.
John flashes one glance at the lovely bent head:
"Will God be so good, so blessedly kind?
Ah! would I could see all that moves in her mind, —
If she is at peace, my beautiful one,
And no lasting hurt to that true heart done!

'Twas bitter to see, when my darling returned,
How deep the hot flame in her heart had burned.
Oh! bitter, yet sweet, the generous care
She took to be busy and cheerful, and seem
As if there had been no broken love-dream;
Disguising, in song and laughter and jest,
The pain which no one could help her to bear.

"My heart like a hammer is beating my breast,
Because she is near; but *she* does not sigh,
Nor falter, nor flutter in happy unrest.
It was not thus when that other stood by:
I have seen her start from her maiden repose,
And blush at his step as an opening rose.
It was hard: but yet, God knows, I was glad
At sight of the joy my poor darling had;
And the pain that came after was worse to see
Than that she had never a thought of me.

"More quiet she is than in olden days;
But there's peace, content, in her gentle ways:
Or is it that what I would have her be
Paints with my wishes the signs I see?"
"What are you dreaming of, John?" says she.
"You're frowning and smiling at such a rate,
And crumbling the bread all over your plate!"
John thinks, "How blessed to have her so near,
Her eyes meeting mine, untroubled and clear!

"What if I answered her straight and true,—
Clasping her close, as I long to do,—
'I am dreaming with all my heart of you'?
My touch and my words might break the dear calm
Of the heart I would die to shelter from harm.
Oh, I long to tell her! If I could know

She could bear to hear, and would understand
How I love her more for that innocent woe,
And put my whole heart in her little hand!

"But what my eyes to all others confess
She looks in them daily, and does not guess.
Looks at me! yes, but with only her eyes:
Her heart, her thought, in some other world lies.
Where are her thoughts when she seems so far,
With the distance and stillness of a star?
She has known me always. I am as the shelf,
The table, or chair, or part of herself;
As the custom and warmth she feels from the fire,
Too near for remembrance, too sure for desire.
Has she forgotten, or will she forget?
One word too soon might be endless regret.
At least she is tranquil. Not yet, not yet!"

Thus strives John's mind in the swift-flitting space
Of the flush that sweeps over his strong, dark face;
And, as he sits talking of North and South, —
For a spirited man is the Farmer Brown,
And he plies John closely for news from town, —
John's eyes, with other thoughts than his mouth,
Wander away to the light-tripping feet,
And quick little hands, making every thing neat.
And his heart heaves high when Meg takes her seat
In her favorite place at her father's feet,
And, laying her shining head on his knee,
Sinks deep in a restful revery.
Roused from her musing, she listens at last:
Is it silent John who is speaking so fast?
Unseen in the shadow, her soft earnest eyes
Regard him intently in quaint surprise.

"Why, neighbor, I never cut down a tree,
And looked on it, lying with never a sound,
Save a murmur of leaves, like half-heard song,
All its broad, brave branches trailing the ground,
A tangle of nests its brown forks among,
But I felt as if I'd done wickedly.
But to shoot at men, and fell and hew them,
And think it a noble thing that I slew them!
I was with mother when Stephen was born:
She gave him life, and, so giving, she died,
Holding my hand with a smile: in the morn
The costly life flickered out at her side.
Rebels I scorn! — yet, marshalled before them,
I should see *men;* see mothers who bore them!
The brave birth-anguish! Oh, never a thrust
Of mine could level such work in the dust.
I'd die at my post, but never touch life
So precious to mother, or sweetheart, or wife!"

"Well, John," said the farmer, "each man is his own,
And a healthy man doesn't long for death:
The heart in my breast ain't exactly a stone,
But I'd kill a rebel at every breath!
If worst comes to worst, — and it looks like it now, —
I'd serve the old flag as never the plough;
I'd jump at your place, and you might stay here!"
For good Farmer Brown, it was almost a sneer.

But Meg cried, "Father, you don't understand!"
And rose with a gesture of exquisite grace.
"You know he's no coward!" and caught John's hand,
Kissed it, and flashed such a light in his face,
That John sat blinded and perfectly still
In the sweet thrall of that passionate thrill;

While Meg, all trembling, yet smiling and bright,
Kissed father and mother a hurried good-night.

THE DEPARTURE.

The winter was gone, and the worst had come:
The flag had been outraged, and every son
Of the lion North burned to see vengeance done.
With opening buds came the roll of the drum,
And John Brown's soul was surely marching on.
One night, as the lamps were lighted within,
The door was pushed open, and John came in.
Past Meg and the mother to Farmer Brown
He strode; and he said, "I'm just back from town.
I've enlisted: my company goes to-night."
Then the farmer rose, and stretched out his hand:
"Ah, John! I knew it would come, and thou'rt
right."

But John drew back as the farmer drew near:
"Of death for myself I have not one fear:
But I will not kill! so you understand."
Then the farmer laughed, and laid hold of John:
"When you're in the thick, that fancy will go
As thistle-down when the fresh winds blow.
Ay, lad, I know thee: if my own son
Had lived, he had not been more to my mind.
Thy softness vexed me; but I'm not blind. —
Come, little mother, and thou little maid,
And touch the stuff of which heroes are made:
Thy woman's words will put cheer in his heart. —
Ay, John, I'm right glad, and yet loath to part!"

As he ceased, and turned to the chimney-place,
A great wave of color rushed over John's face.
He swayed for an instant, and then stood calm
And statelily firm as the shaft of a palm.

He put out his arms, and they saw and heard
His heart break out in one look and word,—
"Meg!" and he waited with laboring breath.
She looked on him, startled, grew pale as death,
And spoke not, but drew her father's rough coat,
And covered her face and her swelling throat.
A silence fell; then quick steps crossed the floor
To her side; a hand just touched her fair head,
As if in the stillness a prayer was said;
Then receding steps, and a closing door.

TIDINGS.

The sky was soft with the glory of June:
Once more the hedge-rows were white and red
With hawthorn bloom, and the lilting tune
Of robin and oriole overhead
Poured sweetness into the yellow noon.

At the triple note of the dinner-horn,
Home came the farmer from hoeing corn.
"Why, where!" he cried, and stood fumbling about,
Turning pocket by pocket inside out.
"I've got a letter from John," he said:
"I put it somewher's." — "I guess I know,"
Laughed Meg, and gave him a loving pat
With the little hand, that, lifting his hat,
Showed the letter safe on top of his head!
He took it down quickly, looked hard, muttered "Sho!"
Then, without more ado, he opened and read
How John had been in the terrible fight,
And lost his heart and his conscience quite.

"Alas! it's just as you said," wrote he:
"My heart was lying like lead in my breast;

But when the word came, and the rebel gray
Bristled hardly a bayonet's length away,
A red-hot devil leaped into me,
And I fought and raged like a brute with the
rest.
Oh! I feel as two men embodied in one, —
A brute in the battle, a saint when it's done!
I never imagined what awful power
Could press a man's soul in the battle-hour, —
The dreadful groans, and the bright blood streaming,
The smoke and the shock, the horses screaming,
The curses that thicken the panting breath,
Hot life leaping over collapse of death.

. . . . . .

"One poor fellow — they have brought him in
here —

Keeps saying, 'Poor Mary! Good-by, Mary dear!'
The surgeon has told me 'twill soon be past:
His side is crushed in, and he cannot last.

. . . . . .

"He's gone. We took from the wound in his breast
A bit of paper: the shell took the rest.
Ah, poor blood-stained words! 'Your Mary' it's signed.
So *thou* hast left a true sweetheart behind!
With smooth white forehead and clustering curl,
Thou look'st as thou wert a sleeping girl.

"But he fought like a tiger; and, when he fell,
He laughed in the face of that horrible shell.
Poor fellow! there's one'll grieve sore over thee.
Thank God she is spared this distracting sight!

Could I heal thy wound, and give thee my
breath,
And take thy place in that stillness of death,
'Twere well for thy 'Mary,' and well for me;
And, it seems to me, 'twere more just and
right.

. . . . . .

"I must get an hour's rest for to-morrow's
fight.
God bless thee! old cottage and friends, good-
night!
Or perhaps — God knoweth — 'twill be good-by!
Well, the easiest thing in life is to die."

And that morrow came, and with shot and shell
Turned blossoming fields into wastes of hell.
Close under the mid-air level of smoke
The long writhing columns gathered and broke:

When the red earth steamed in the noonday sun,
The gray were flying, the blue had won.

As the glow of the setting sun is spread
Over ghastly heaps of the dying and dead,
John creeps with sore heart and averted head;
And his eyes are dim with a bitter mist
As he gropes at the pulseless breast and wrist.
Death's awful level is wrought that day:
Whether friend or foe, or in blue or gray,
John's heart-sick pity no difference feels.
One faintly wails "Water!" John, yearning, kneels,
Starts back, and gasps forth, with a spurning shove, —
"Traitor to country, as faithless in love!"

The thick bright hair and the sensuous mouth,
All the dark ripe grace of the fervid South,—
Though dust-smirched and death-pale, John knows them well,
And the heaven of pity grows hate of hell.
Meg's kiss on his hand, and that wave of light
From her beaming eyes on that winter's night,
How happy they made him! and now he knew
They were not for him, but this traitor Hugh.
"It is not my doing if he dies there."
John's lips are set, and his glance is a glare.

And the face strong pity had made so sweet
Bends, cruel as death, o'er that face at his feet.
And *there* is no pleading: a shuddering sigh
Was all that followed that piteous cry.
No pleading! dark clots of blood at the breast,
And eyes staring blank in the rosy west.

John's heart is torn in the fiery strife
Betwixt the strong angels of Death and Life;
Nor heedeth he, as the moment passes,
The evening-hymn of the wind-blown grasses.

Far North, the same sunset's wide-flowing light,
Pouring through parting of curtains white,
Falls rosily over the table, spread
With its simple blessing of daily bread,
And golden butter, and bowls of new milk.
Meg, threading one hand in the rippled silk
Of her beautiful hair, in the gateway stands,
In the midst of her father's well-tilled lands.
With a stately swell to the North they rise,
With the laughter of hills, and whisper of vales,
Under motion and music of bloom-sweetened gales,
On every side circling to meeting skies.

But stream and meadow, and woodland maze,
Mapped in the glow of those setting rays,
Unheeded, are glassed in her wistful gaze.
Southward she looks, and silently prays;
For the faith of women and children is hers,—
That rock-like faith which no doubting stirs.
So her heart is eased, and the quiet charm
Of the evening felt, as she swings the gate,
And runs to her father, and takes his arm,
And asks, "What news, that you come so late?"

The farmer unwrinkled his brow, and smiled;
For his heart was quick to his graceful child.
But the frown came back as he sternly said,—
"There's a bloody work since this day began:
No certain news; but there's dying and dead;
Rife rumors to make the stoutest heart sick;

And John — his company went in the thick;
And they say it is butchered, to a man!"

"Let us wait till we know. Father, don't fear:
All is well with John; for I feel it here."
At that he turned quickly, and spake more cold:—
"O child! such hoping comes easy to thee,
Who could not love him, who loved thee so dear.
But he had become as a son to me,
And I bear it ill: I am growing old.
But I should not blame thee: love bides no will."
Meg sighed; yet a warm, ineffable thrill
Stirred sweetly her heart as she crossed the sill.

And far to the South, in that death-strewn place,

In the self-same moment John lifts his face:
All its stern hard lines into beauty break.
"I had forgotten! She loves him still;
And he shall not perish, for her dear sake."
And swift the pale temples and poor parched lips
He touches with cool dripping finger-tips:
Then, bending, he lifts him tenderly;
Crouching, he bears him on hand and knee;
For the rebel pickets still mark the spot;
And there's danger, too, from a random shot.

And ever he creeps with more painful care,
With whitening lips and sweat-streaming hair.
His burden is heavy; his strength ebbs fast.
A shock, and the sky and the earth reel past,
Then back to their places. He feels no pain,
But will never lift his right arm again.

As a sleeping babe his pale burden lies,
But living. John feels the heart faintly beat;
Sweeps the darkening field with his bloodshot eyes;
Perceives betwixt him and the fading skies
One moving, and toward him with all his strength
Drags his moaning burden a body's length;
Cries "Help!" with last might of his loving will;
Then the pale lips pressed to the earth are still.

THE RETURN.

With long tender twilight and golden morn,
And glory of noon, the bright days sped on.
Through yellowing fields the tall tasselled corn
Shook silken green plumes in the August sun,
And berries turned black where the slopes were shorn.

Under far-floating veil of purpled haze,
September went musing by hillside ways.
So autumn came, and no tidings from John;
Till one night, after supping, as Farmer Brown,
With his head on his breast, rode into town,
He saw at the tavern a dust arise,
And heard a loud mingling of cheers and cries;
In a daze sat listening and looking on,
Till an old villager up to him ran,
And plucked at his sleeve, "Eh! look alive, man!
It's Jem, from the war, — the old widow's son:
He'll know, I'll be bound, all about thy John."

The farmer leaped down, and he did not speak;
But the muscles twitched in his swarthy cheek.
He pressed through the crowd at the porch; and there

Lay Jem's crutches across the landlord's chair,
And Jem in a heap on the old settee,
With his right leg gone from above the knee.
Now they who were listening, close gathered about,
When the farmer strode in, went softly out.

"I know not for sure if John lives or dies,"
Said Jem, looking kindly from hollow eyes.
"I'll tell thee at once as much as I know."
"Ay, do, tell me all," the farmer said,
And drew him a chair, — for he ill could stand, —
And sat holding fast by either hand.
"When I saw him last, six long weeks ago,
Our surgeon had given him over for dead:
He was wasted to nought with the fever glow,
The loss of his arm, and the craze of his head.

"He fought like a hero! Came sound from the
fight;
For I was with him. But then he must go,
Not waiting for rest or cover of night, —
For though day was spent, and the sun below
The brim of the earth, the west was as bright
As a torch, and the field aflood with light, —
Fagged, famished, and not yet breathed from
the strife,
But watchful for motion, or moan of pain,
Poor John must go creeping among the slain,
In his hunger o' mercy for saving life.

"After that I went in, and ate and slept.
When I rose and came out the night had crept
Closer; but millions of stars in the sky
Made a soft light. As I stood, a red gleam
Flashed out from the farther side of the stream;

And the flash was followed by such a cry!
We followed the sound to the edge of the camp;
And there lay thy John, and that faithless scamp,—
That fellow—curse him!—that came here last year,
And wooed and jilted our girls far and near.

"We brought them in, and we did what we could.
Nought ailed *him*, the traitor, but loss of blood.
But John's arm had to go: the cruel knife,
And the strain of that day, they sapped his life.
Then the fever set in, and day by day
Burned his little short wick of life away.
And then" (Jem laid his thin hand on his knee),
"In the next battle, this happened to me.
After that, when I grew better, and tried
To look up poor John, they said he had died."

It flashed through the farmer's crushed thought to say
There were other things he would like to hear
Concerning the Union good men held dear,
And to offer to Jem his homeward ride:
There were seat and blanket to spare at his side.
But he rose in silence, and strode away:
Beneath the old elms and out of the town,
With his head on his breast, rode Farmer Brown.

The warm, gentle breeze that began to blow
Waved the shadowy grasses to and fro;
The little brook running beside the road
Cheerily sparkled and sang as it flowed.
But he hasted home, and he took no heed,
And heard not the hoofs that followed with speed.

He crossed his threshold, and told in a breath,
As it had been told unto him, John's death;
The patience, the valor, the generous deed,
And for whom he had yielded up his life;
Adding no word of his own to the tale;
But wearily turning from child and wife,
Who hearkened unto him speechless and pale,
He crossed the wide hearth, and sank in his chair.
That instant a tumult grew in the air,
Of wheels, voices, steps, and a happy shout
That swelled and pressed close to the door without.

Then the door burst open; and in the space
Of the star-lighted dusk they saw a face,
Meagre and pallid and hollow-eyed,
And bright, fresh faces that gathered beside.

As they crowded forward, the foremost said,
With a bashful pluck at his hatless head, —
"Old neighbor, thou left us broken and sad;
And we followed after to make thee glad,
And tried to come up with thee, — all in vain;
For thou'dst given thy spanking mare the rein.
Thou hadst not ridden a mile, ere the train,
That came whistling in with the latest post,
Steamed off, after leaving wi' us — John's ghost!"

The farmer passed one hand over his brow,
And, rising, caught hold of the chimney-shelf,
And his wife's shoulder, to steady himself;
And, "John!" said he huskily, — "John, is it thou?"
A smile flickered over John's meagre face
As he staggered up in the chimney-place;
But he would not sit in the chair the, drew,

Nor speak, nor touch any hand, till he knew
If the farmer's daughter welcomed him too.

With marble-pale features and quivering chin
Meg looked as a lily when John came in;
Now softly came forward a little ways,
And flushed as a rose to his yearning gaze;
Nearer with dark drooping lashes she came:
O'er brow, face, and throat the heart-color flew,
Till the lily was rose, and the rose a flame,
And the flame half quenched in the sudden dew
Of the swift-lifted eyes, that pierced him through
With the sweet, strong lustre of happy love.

The empty sleeve she lifted, and pressed
To her lips, and laid it over her breast:

Then clasped she her hands, and raised them above
His bending head, and, passing them over,
Drew them close round the neck of her lover.
He looked on her trembling, but could not speak
For the great hot tears that wetted his cheek.
A little she turned her beautiful face
To the others grouped in the chimney-place;
And she thanked and blessed them with gentlest grace,
And was proud that every one there should see,
Who had only one arm, he now had three!
And but for her arms he had sunk at her feet
For joy so sudden, and wonder so sweet.
Then forth went neighbors and father and mother,
Leaving those two alone with each other.

HOME.

September went by, and October came,
And ripened the nuts under leaves aflame.
Languidly throned on the upland swells,
The Indian summer, as in a swoon,
Through the palpitation of white-hot noon,
Slept to the music of wedding-bells!

For the beautiful daughter of Farmer Brown
Was wedded that morning in yonder town.
Together they knelt at the altar-rail:
Like a rose the bride bloomed under her veil;
But the joy of the bridegroom made him pale.
As they rose, and turned to the gathered throng,
The choir broke forth into wedding-song;
And many a blessing of glance and smile
Met them, and followed them down the aisle.

A moment they paused on the threshold-stone;
Then hand-clasped, and silent went forth alone:
Across the fields, through the golden weather,
This bride and bridegroom went on together.

But, when they had come to the meadow-stile,
She, suddenly lifting her graceful head,
Put back her veil; with a glorious smile
Looked full in her husband's face, and said, —
"We have taken together the marriage-vow:
Let us keep it forever, beginning *now*.
If you love me, trust me with all, not part,
Of the life that beats in my husband's heart.
From the very day you came back again
Has a little shadow between us lain:
My effort to banish it all in vain.
So I waited, and thought, 'When I am his wife,
I will put that shadow out of his life.'

John, let us begin in our strength and our youth
To live love's life in the uttermost truth."

Then he answered her straight, "I had one fear,
But was ever ashamed to tell it thee, —
Thou art so beautiful, love, and so dear,
And I so common! I thought, were *he* here,
Oh! couldst thou and wouldst thou have chosen me?
And this is the cloud that between us came, —
This doubt" — and he colored in noble shame —
"Of thy love and trust, so shining and clear."

She stood in silence a little while,
With a shy, strange sweetness in look and smile;

Then drew his hand gently under her cheek, —
A way she had when in earnest to speak, —
"This is all? Thank God! for then all is well.
Love, I have a little story to tell
Of something that chanced at this very stile.
One night, just seven before you came home,
When these fields in the twilight were all afoam
With wind-waved daisies, and swallows flew,
And dipped their quick wings in the daisies' dew,
And the fair young moon in the tranquil west
Leaned her golden bow on the mountain's crest,
A maiden sat down on this stile to rest;
And scarce was she seated ere some one came
Out of the shadow and uttered her name,
And startled the calm sweet thoughts in her breast

As a ghost at the side of a wedding-guest;
And she stood before him, in silence opprest.
He had youth and beauty, and every grace
Sad memory gives to a once loved face.

"And simply he spoke: 'He loved her at last
Truly, and craved her full grace for the past,
And that when the war was done she would come
And be his queen-wife in his Southern home.
To say this thing he had stolen away,
And travelled footsore 'twixt night and day.'

"And she, listening, wept with the tender pain
Of a true heart's pity for true love slain
Past the power or desire of quickening again.
And thus she made answer in simple phrase:—
'I do forgive thee with all my heart;
But thy life in mine hath no more a part.

I loved thee once, and for many days
And nights I sorrowed in secret for thee;
But the anguish passed, and there came to me,
As in a vision, so sudden and sweet,
The precious boon of a love complete,
That lay at my heart as the flower at my feet.
Through winter and summer, through cloud and shine,
Had this service of perfect love been mine.
But in that strange moment when first I saw
This love of loves, and knew it was mine,
I felt unworthy, and stricken with awe;
And he went from me, and he had no sign.
But I love him with the one love of my life,
And will be unwed, or that good man's wife.'"

Just over their heads in the happy skies,
As she ceased, there came a twitter of birds.

She smiled, looking up: but with glistening eyes
He drew her close; there were no more words.

So they went home. When the night came down,
Silent and dark was the church in the town,—
Empty of all the gay wedding-throng,
Empty of echoes of wedding-song.
And the little house that sits on the hill,
Under cluster of vines, was dark and still;
Yet there was begun the immortal song,
Where love's white thoughts were the wedding-throng,
And there was lighted the mystic light
That fadeth not out by day or night.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

"Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."
THANATOPSIS.

Amantem sui Natura Salutat.

THUS sang a glorious voice, that, full and free,
Filled all the atmosphere from star to sea: —

"Speed hither, winds, and blend in noble mirth
The many-chorded harmonies of earth;
Bend, cloudless heavens, thy quickening golden eye
Beyond the mountain snows that crest on high
To the deep centres where my germ-worlds lie,
Till all my rolling garden bourgeons fair,

As down the eternal pathway of the sky
I cleave the blue illimitable air."

Lightly as airs that follow summer rain,
The glorious voice sank to a softer strain: —

"Glide, joyous brooks, with silvery lullings where
Tall reeds and glistening grasses interlace
With willow, drooping like a mermaid's hair,
To screen the 'waterfowl's' green hiding-place.

"Or cast up sparkling, on secluded shore,
Fair Sella's slippers, white and 'spangled o'er,'
So little maidens couched in mossy nook,
In the deep wonder of some fairy book,
Up-glancing, shall behold in still delight
The crystal gleaming of those sandals bright,

And dream they dance with gentle sea-nymphs where
Through pale-green brine descends the ocean-stair.

"And thou, his 'childhood's favorite,' 'Rivulet,'
See that thou dost not in thy sports forget
To kiss with lightsome lip, all soft and wet,
In springs to come, the earliest violet
That opes its modest beauty on thy brim;
In tender covenant, 'sweet rill,' with him
Whose 'little feet,' in springs that come no more,
Used oft to press the greenness of thy shore,
And in whose song men hear, as in a dream,
The gladsome murmur of thy winding stream;
For he hath had his hope, and written high
The name he dreamed in youth 'should never die.'

"Come, gentle 'west wind,' that in fragrant vale
Lists to the 'jug-jug' of the nightingale,
Or hears among the pines that dusk the hill
The wooing 'ring-dove' and the whippoorwill,—
Come, breathe thy hymn in leaves that bend above
Him who hath named thee 'wind of youth and love.'

"And ye, glad choir of the young summer days,
Your myriad melodious bills unclose
To welcome him, who, 'ripe in wisdom, lays
His silver temples in their last repose'
Upon the blossom-broidered breast of June:
So in prophetic wistful song he prayed —
Ere life's auroral morn had burned to noon —
That in the joy of June his grave be made.

He sang thy praise, O 'June'! and well mayst thou
Bring all thy beauty to his coming now:
Let thy soft breathings, blending odors rare,
Tune the green reed-harps where his slumbers are!
Call thy bright butterflies — in half-embrace
Of shining wings — to veil the sacred place;
Ask of thy lilies, scarlet, purple, white,
Their fairest petals for a drapery bright
Which the deft humming-bird and housewife-bee
Shall weave with skeins of cobweb skilfully;
Sprinkle with incense thy most fragrant leaves
Distil in dewy morns and drowsy eves.

"Well mayst thou give the welcome of a queen
To this calm guest, who, silent and serene,

Comes in 'unfaltering trust' sustained, content
To make my couch yet more magnificent."

Pacing the invoking earth with throbbing feet,
As sank its glorious voice in cadence sweet,
June plucked the budding roses from her breast,
And cast them from warm palms to east and west,
And, smiling, blew from open dewy mouth
White lilies north, and scarlet lilies south;
For, anywhere that rose or lily fell,
Bird, bee, and butterfly would know full well
That they were summoned from the flower and nest
To do him honor who had loved them best.

Lightly from mossy cleft and balmy glade
Flitted those tiny shining creatures made

To pass their brief bright being of an hour
In fanning fragile wings o'er wave and flower.
Up flew the wren and the sweet-throated thrush,
The ground-bird rose from grasses growing lush,
The oriole lifted plume from sides aflame,
The bluebird from the bending hawthorn came,
Red-vested robin waved his surtout brown,
The lark from dazzling eyry fluttered down,
Till they were as a cloud in the white tide.
Fast, fast their whirring numbers multiplied:
Ten thousand flutes and bugles blown in glee
Could ne'er have wakened such a jubilee
As on they sang, each in its own blithe way,
"Our friend, our gentle friend, has come to stay!"

But when within the golden, glimmering shade,
Beside the narrow bed so richly made,

They saw the "spotted fawn" leap unafraid,
And slowly from the deeper grove appear,
Listening, the luminous-eyed "white-footed deer,"
With softer twitterings they hovered near,
Their dark eyes brighter for the brilliant notes
Swelling unwarbled in their glossy throats.
Some thronged on slender branches, blossom-drest,
That linked their flickering shadows o'er his breast,
And some on bough and stem and flowering spray,
While "Robert o' Lincoln" led the loving lay.

His gallant crest and shoulders were as white,
His coat as black, as on his wedding-night,
As merrily he swung, and told his name;
While with her timid chirp his pretty dame

Through the tall grass — remembering whose
praise
Made such a merit of her wifely ways,
And seeing how his blessèd couch was decked —
Brought shyly her "white eggs" with "purple
flecked."
Softly at first, then clearer swelled and higher,
The grateful chorus of that countless choir.

As, closer circling to his place of rest,
Each sang the little song that pleased *him* best,
Bearing a "snow-white flower," a little child
Drew near, with artless gaze and motion mild:
"'Stainless,' he said, 'with stainless, sweet with
sweet;'
And he will like to have it at his feet
Who loved so much to walk among the flowers,
And talk with little children hours and hours.

And don't you think 'twill please him, pretty
birds,
That I remembered just his very words, —
Because I love him so, — and ran to bring
My 'snow-white flower' when I heard you
sing?"

"We love him too," so all the birds replied,
And looked at her with little heads aside;
"For he loved us, and we were ne'er afraid
To show him where our pretty eggs were laid,
Or sit on the low branches where he stood
With brow uncovered in the bloomy wood.
And we shall come with summer every year,
And sing to the dear friend who slumbers here.
But when" (they sang more low) "the golden-rod,
And fair 'fringed gentian' that looks up to
God,

Begin to droop and wither, and the sky
To chill and darken, then the birds must fly:
When trees are naked, and the tempests keep
Wild revels with them, who will guard his sleep?"

Then from the mists of mountains far and high
Slid down faint voices in a slender cry:—
"Fear not, ye little birds; for when ye go,
And when the bitter winds begin to blow,
With airy footsteps, and with robes that flow,
We will come down your vacant place to fill,
And with the touch of fingers light and chill
Weave him a lustrous raiment, lovelier far
Than all the burning blooms of summer are;
Rear him who loved all things that God hath made
A temple exquisite, with colonnade

Of fluted pillars, azured and embossed
With 'tufts of silvery rime,' and 'wreaths of frost;'
And he who rests beneath it — he will know
We are his 'Little People of the Snow.'"

. . . . . .

"Old sorrows are forgotten now,
Or but remembered to make sweet the hour
That overpays them."

FLOOD OF YEARS.

In the cold spray of the oncoming "flood"
Already veiled in evening's mist he stood,
Yet turned, and told the vision he beheld —
As the exhaustless current nearer swelled —
To them who waited, yearning for each word;
And when he could not for the roar be heard,

Still they could see him for a little while
Look toward them from the thickening mist, and smile
As he would comfort them; then on the shore
Broke the dark wave, and he was seen no more.

But not as one in grief, or chill of fear,
He saw the billow's breaking edge draw near,
And knew the roaring on the abysmal brim
Beneath the "belt of darkness" summoned him.
Serene his eye, as calmly looking back
He saw on the broad torrent's desert track
His gallant ship that long ago set sail, —
Hope at the helm, and promise in the gale, —
With the vast fleet of unreturning hopes
Lie bleaching on the wave-uncovered slopes,
And thought, "The hope it did not bring it bore;

Life was the richer on some other shore:
For the Great Purpose, Love, is never crossed:
No pain is useless, and no joy is lost."

His ear was filled, his great heart satisfied,
With the sweet greetings that came down the tide
To bless and bid him God speed who had cared,
With deep unselfish love, how nations fared.

Like breezes blown from fair, far isles of peace,
Rang the glad pæan from the hills of Greece:—
"From Scio's vale, where 'Turkish falchions shed'
Her people's blood till every wave ran red,
Clear shall her waters flow into the sea;
'For God and her good sword' shall set Greece free:

Yet 'terrible' shall her 'deliverance be:'
So ran, great soul, thy solemn prophecy."

Where the wild Sierra slopes to spicy plain,
From her weary bondage rose the voice of Spain:—
"Blessed be the eyes that beheld the day
When my sons should lift my galling yoke away,
And once more my vineyards to the blue sea
Be sweet with the thanksgiving of the free!"

From the white Alps and purple Apennines,
And rivers sweeping under fruited vines,
Down scarred Vesuvius to the leaping sea,
Swelled the glad cry, "'Italy is free!'
As ye foretold, the good God, he hath willed:
Behold, great seer, thy prophecy fulfilled!"

And Europe from her darkening conflict cried,
"Thy word to me — it shall be glorified!
My 'struggling multitude of states' must be
Deluged in blood; but blood shall make them free.
The 'moment set,' as shown thee in the past,
To 'rescue and raise up,' is come at last!"

Then in his own dear land, where his brave strain
In strong vibrations shattered Slavery's chain,
Pierced Error till he writhed in mortal pain,
And lifted bruisèd Truth to heaven again,
Rose the half-smothered wail of those who stood
Behind him when he met the mighty flood;
Saw him caught up, smiling, swept from view, —
If what the "good and wise have said" be true,

Only to pass where wisdom is revealed,
Sorrows forgot, and wounds forever healed;
Where all who love and suffer here again
Renew the blessèd vow, without the pain;
And where is endless peace in place of strife,
And Love hath wedded Everlasting Life!

"NOT PEACE, BUT A SWORD."

A FANTASY.

I FELL asleep, and dreams revealed to me
The vision of a city great and free,
Twice-girdled by a zone of sunlit sea,
And by a wall of flawless masonry.
Without the gates a peerless woman sat
In flowing robes the light waves murmured at, —
In flowing robes whose full and classic fold
Fell like repose o'er limbs of perfect mould:
A dove on her fair forehead lightly sitting
Seemed poising midway between rest and flitting.

"My name is Peace," she said: "my work is yon," —
Her strong arm lifting from her swelling breast,
And circling royally from west to west;
"Mine is this rock-zoned city, by the sun
And fragrant wind and freighted wave caressed.

"A thousand streams from hill-born fountains flowing,
In many a frolic swirl of ripple, plash, and purl,
Run laughing on to turn the busy wheels
That set my rich designs to countless reels.
A thousand gales from distant cloudland blowing,
The nearer air with fertile magic sowing,
In soft pulsations as of unseen plumes,
Beat the sweet incense from earth's varied blooms,

And, o'er the vernal velvet of her vales,
Flit seaward to coquet with waiting sails.

"My high-born maiden in embroidered train
Glides down the shining, wide, and winding stair,
To music's faintly palpitating strain, —
Her graceful step its best translation there, —
Through halls that give her beauty back again,
From mirrors polished into crystal air,
That seem in endless vistas to retain
The beauties each repeating makes more fair.

"My cottage-maiden lists to love at eve,
Her glossy head upon her peasant's shoulder,
Her silken favor floating from his sleeve,
His lips to hers when dusk hath made love bolder;

For changeful love is only all it seems,
When Peace hath bidden it gild a maiden's dreams.

"The ripe perfection of my pride and power
Lies in that subtlest art that curbs and reins,
As a trained steed, the throb in human veins,—
The art that ever is, yet seemeth not to be;
That on the hut of serf uprears the feudal tower,
And locks the lips of nobles with a golden key,
Holding him closest slave who deems himself most free,
Beguiling vassalage with dreams of liberty."

While yet she spoke, the sun was whelmed away
As by the shadows of the close of day,

And all the sky besprent with sudden stars,
Each flashing with the baleful glow of Mars;
While from afar, all darkly settling down,
Colossal, black, and foul as charnel-pit,
With errant lightnings redly seamed and lit,
A mighty cloud rolled o'er the fated town.

Then she, the peerless woman, rose and wailed:
Through all her lovely limbs her spirit quailed;
The dove upon her forehead spread its plume,
And cleft with flagging wing the gathering gloom.
Brief space she gazed, then bowed her royal head
Upon her struggling breast, and, groping, fled.

Then I beheld the fearful cloud take shape
Like to no form of mortal mould or ken,

And it seemed clothed upon with armèd men.
"My name is War!" it cried. "I glut with rape
Of hope and home and hearth my greedy heart:
My car of triumph is the reeking cart,
That bears, 'mid furrows of relinquished shields,
The quivering hecatombs of battle-fields.

"I love to cleave the brow of Art, and maim
Her laurel-wreathèd limbs beyond reclaim;
To hurl proud Science from her ancient seat,
And cast her fane in ruins at her feet;
To paint in blood the sky upon your waves;
To undulate your happy land with graves.

"Earth has one only music, to mine ears
More sweet than to the bride her wedding-bells:

'Tis the sharp chorus of the crashing shells,
The groans that gurgle up through blood and
tears."

The dreadful cloud passed on: the light of day,
Slow-raying from the forehead of the East,
Touched a gaunt figure, travel-worn and lorn,
That, passing as the golden light increased,
Held fast in quivering hands a tyrant's crown;
Paused at the city gates, and dashed it down;
Then raised a face of queenly loveliness —
Though wan and haggard in its strong distress —
Above the tatters of a beggar's dress,
That, covering her in its unseemly fold,
Still left not all her trembling grace untold.

"Hear me, O city of my love!" she cried.
"I come to thee, not in mine olden pride

Of sceptre, crown, and gilded galling chain:
I have put all these costly things aside, —
Too costly! paid in coin of heart and brain!
Basely I did betray: I will atone,
Counting all thine, not feeling aught my own,
Or only mine that it may yield through me
Tenfold the good I once required of thee.
I drained thy heart for rubies in my crown:
My tears have made them diamonds: I lay down
The burning treasure — it is strangely meet —
As bridge and beacon for thy bruisèd feet
From bitter slaveries to Freedom's sweet.

"Trust me, my people: I have sinned; but yet
I have repented, and have paid the price.
My tears so flowed, the gates of heaven are wet!"
Then fell a tender voice from Paradise,

That spoke to her in such mysterious word,
I can but tell the meaning that I heard:—

"Beware the refluence of currents trained
To stifle Nature's sweetness at the source:
In trodden hearts they gain an earthquake's force,
And wreak centrifugal revenge at last.
Divine Humanity,—too surely drained
From the galled bosoms of a people chained
To serve no simple inspiration of their own,
But stand on their own hearts to lift a throne,—
Wrought ye the ghastly lesson of the past.
Thou wert the false peace sunk in selfish power:
Thou art new born of Sorrow! Meet thine hour!
And of the cosmic drama learn thy part,—
The priceless value of one human heart."

The tender voice, receding, seemed to rise,
And pass to silence up the distant skies.
Hope lit the listening woman's lustrous eyes:
The very movement of her buoyant feet
Seemed set to the beatitude of love,
In which her wasted face grew grand and sweet.
Like a white fragment of the glow above,
Down glistening through the ether came her dove,
Just touched the lips its golden bill caressed,
And sunk in fluttering rapture on her breast,
As toward that ransomed city by the sea,
She, yearning, turned in love's great majesty.

I followed her, — for sleep has no control
Over the silent pilgrim in the soul, —
And I desired with all my soul to seize
The utmost meaning of these mysteries;

To knit them with my thought, that I might make
Their perfect revelation when awake.
And when I felt the spell of sleep unbind,
And the unfinished dream elude my mind,
I dipped me in the conscious thrall so deep,
It could not slip the outer fold of sleep.

At length I leaped awake, with eager heart
The finished marvel burning to impart.
Instant the Future set on my thrilled lip her seal:
"The past is mine," she said: "I will reveal!"

LITTLE MARTIN CRAGHAN.[1]

ONE reads to me Macaulay's "Lays"
With fervid voice, intoning well:
The poet's fire, the vocal grace, —
They hold me like a spell.

[1] The brave boy, only ten years old, whose fate is the subject of the following verses, was *murdered by the mining system.* He was employed in one of the Pittston mines. When the shaft caught fire, he with a comrade sought to escape. Suddenly he remembered that some men who were busy in a farther chamber of the mine must be unaware of their danger. There was but one outlet, but one chance. He left both to his little mate, and darted back into the mine. He hoped for time to warn the men, and yet make good his own escape; but he knew well the frightful risk, and accepted it. He reached the men, warned them, and fled back to the shaft, to find that hope, only too slender before, was now absolutely gone. He turned, and hurried through the galleries once more, that he might die with them for whom he gave his life. They had builded with desperate haste a wall between them and the deadly gases and vapors which rolled thickening toward them. Even then their chance of surviving was a slim one. To let him in was to admit certain death: so they refused his prayer. They heard him sob, and walk falteringly away. He was afterward found quite dead, a little board beside him, on which, with a piece of chalk, he had, in dying, feebly written the names of loved ones.

'Twere marvel if in human veins
Could beat a pulse so cold
It would not quicken to the strains,
The flying, fiery strains, that tell
How Romans "kept the bridge so well
In the brave days of old."
The while I listened, till my blood,
Plunged in the poet's martial mood,
Rushed in my veins like wine,
I prayed, — to One who hears, I wis, —
"Give me one breath of power like this
To sing of Pittston mine!"

. . . . . .

A child looks up the ragged shaft, —
A boy whose meagre frame
Shrinks as he hears the roaring draught
That feeds the eager flame.

He has a single chance: the stakes
Of life show death at bay
One moment; then his comrade takes
The hope he casts away.

For while his trembling hand is raised,
And while his sweet eyes shine,
There swells above the love of life
The rush of love divine, —
The thought of those unwarned, to whom
Death steals along the mine.

O little Martin Craghan!
I reck not if you swore,
Like Porsena of Clusium,
By gods of mythic lore;
But well I ween as great a heart
Beat your small bosom sore,

And that your bare brown feet scarce felt
The way they bounded o'er.
I know you were a hero then,
Whate'er you were before;
And in God's sight your flying feet
Made white the cavern floor.

The while he speeds that darksome way,
Hope paints upon his fears
Soft visions of the light of day;
Faint songs of birds he hears;
In summer breeze his tangled curls
Are blown about his ears.

He sees the men; he warns: and now,
His duty bravely done,
Sweet hope may paint the fairest scene
That spreads beneath the sun.

Back to the burning shaft he flies:
There bounding pulses fail;
The light forsakes his lifted eyes;
The glowing cheek is pale.

With wheeling, whirling, hungry flame,
The seething shaft is rife:
Where solid chains drip liquid fire,
What chance for human life?

To die with those he hoped to save,
Back, back, through heat and gloom,
To find a wall! and Death and he
Shut in the larger tomb!

He pleaded to be taken in
As closer rolled the smoke:
In deathful vapors they could hear
His piteous accents choke.

And they, with shaking voice, refused;
And then the young heart broke.

Oh love of life! God made it strong,
And knows how close it pressed;
And death to those who love life least
Is scarce a welcome guest.

One thought of the poor wife, whose head
Last night lay on his breast:
A quiver runs through lips that morn
By children's lips caressed.

These things the sweet strong thoughts of home, —
Though but a wretched place,
To which the sad-eyed miners come
With Labor's laggard pace, —

Remembered in the cavern gloom,
Illume the haggard face, —

Illumed their faces, steeled each heart.
O God! what mysteries
Of brave and base make sum and part
Of human histories!
What will not thy poor creatures do
To buy an hour of breath!
Well for us all some souls are true
Above the fear of death!

He wept a little, — for they heard
The sound of sobs, the sighs
That breathed of martyrdom complete
Unseen of mortal eyes, —
And then, no longer swift, his feet
Passed down the galleries.

He crept and crouched beside his mule,
Led by its dying moan:
He touched it feebly with a hand
That shook like palsy's own.
God grant the touch had power to make
The child feel less alone!

Who knoweth every heart, He knows
What moved the boyish mind;
What longings grew to passion-throes
For dear ones left behind;
How hardly youth and youth's desires
Their hold of life resigned.

Perhaps the little fellow felt
As brave Horatius thought,
When for those dearer Roman lives
He held his own as nought.

For how could boy die better
Than facing fearful fires
To save poor women's husbands
And helpless children's sires?

Death leaned upon him heavily;
But Love, more mighty still, —
She lent him slender lease of life
To work her tender will.

He felt with sightless, sentient hand
Along the wall and ground,
And there the rude and simple page
For his sweet purpose found.

O'erwritten with the names he loved,
Clasped to his little side,

Dim eyes the wooden record read
Hours after he had died.

Thus, from all knowledge of his kind,
In darkness lone and vast,
From life to death, from death to life,
The little hero passed.

And, while they listened for the feet
That would return no more,
Far off they fell in music sweet
Upon another shore.

LOVE'S HOME.

My little room is softly lit
  And tinted by the moon's fair beam:
'Mid silence shadows dimly flit
  As in the vagueness of a dream.

The passing hours I give no heed:
What matters it how fast they speed?
Full long enough the night will be
For solitary thought of thee.

Gently gliding o'er the wall,
Moonbeams on my pillow fall,

Slumber's promise in the ray;
But I turn my head away,
Longing for the sweeter rest
On the pillow of thy breast.

In thine arms so kindly folded,
To thy heart so warmly pressed,
By thy lips in kisses moulded
Mine so tenderly caressed.

. . . . . .

Ah! how swiftly doth thy heart
Hurry 'neath my listening ear!
Noble, faithful, generous heart,
Hurries it that I am near?
While to clasping fingers' ends
Fast its thrilling current sends
Gentle force to hold me here.

Where the heart is, there is home;
Where the home is, there is rest.
Well thou knowest, ere I speak,
Where the home my heart would seek:
Thus, upon thy faithful breast,
Here, and only here, I rest.

THE CHILDREN'S NIGHT.

My Liebling's trustful prayers were said:
She lay at peace in her guileless bed,
As Christmas Eve like a dream came down,
And lights peeped out in the distant town.

The deepening sky, as the day grew dim,
Blossomed with stars from rim to rim;
And past my window, narrow and brown,
The lone road fled to the lighted town.

I sat alone by the fire, and sewed:
My happy heart like the embers glowed.

Ah! mothers can guess what fancies rose,
And slid with my needle in Liebling's clothes.

Was that a sigh of the wind grown still,
So softly breathed between door and sill?
Was it a step on the entry-floor?
Nay; for at nightfall I barred the door.

I smiled; yet my startled heart beat high:
To cheer it I crooned a lullaby.
Again, like a child's light step, that sound!
"Liebling?" I murmured, and turned around.

Oh! was it angel or mortal child,
With gaze so joyous and mien so mild,
Who stood one moment close to my chair,
Then flitted on to the chamber-stair?

"Oh, wake, dear Liebling!" I heard her call:
"It's time to dress for the children's ball.
'Run, Cinderella,' they said; 'be quick!
Let's hear those little glass slippers click

"'Like chirping birds on the sparkling snow:
Oh, run, run, run! and let Liebling know,
With music and dance and flowers and light
We're coming to keep the Children's Night.'

"Make haste, dear Liebling: they'll soon be here;
For, though I ran like the hunted deer,
The wind has harnessed his fleetest span,
And they're coming fast as ever they can."

She paused and listened, and overhead
I caught the swiftest, airiest tread;

And then, like St. Agnes, hushed and sweet,
Her golden tresses loosed to her feet,

Perfect as life, and silent as death,
As one in a muse too deep for breath,
I saw my beautiful Liebling stand,
One stocking hung from her dimpled hand.

Soft bosom and arm and pearl-white side
Shone where her night-dress parted wide.
Cinderella kissed the rose-leaf cheek,
And the parted lips that they might speak,

And the lidded eyes that they might see.
Then Liebling laughed, and the laugh was glee;
And "Tell me, Cinderella," she cried,
"Shall I wear glass shoes, and be Prince's bride?"

In wonder I saw my cottage-walls
Tremble, and change into palace-halls,
Where fountains plashed, and pillared spaces
Bloomed with beauty of children's faces.

Children's voices through windy hushes
Swelled like the garden-song of thrushes:
To hear them laugh, and to hear them sing,
Was like a thousand robins in spring.

My own little Liebling, like the rest,
As gayly played, was as brightly dressed
In dainty robes as were ever planned
By the head modiste of Fairyland.

They were cloth-of-rainbow, finely spun
Of twisted strands of the rain and sun,

And deftly fashioned with tender care
To leave their motions as free as air.

In gala rooms, on the marble stair,
There were children, — children everywhere:
In balconies framed of silver rails
They bent bright heads over fairy tales.

Lightly with wonderful toys they played,
And rolled gay hoops in the colonnade:
The air, as they flocked in merry games,
Was a silver babble of children's names.

Some ran to the banquet-hall, and brought
Sweetmeats and nuts, which the squirrels caught
And munched with a nod and grateful squeak;
For "thanks" in the tongue the squirrels speak.

Some fled with their dimpled fingers full
Of the trailing threads of tinted wool,
Then swarmed together in blithest laughter
To see the kittens scampering after.

Some made pink cups of their hands, and fed
The birds with crumbles of sugared bread.
The little ones, couched in eider-down,
With each a doll for her very own,

Like buds in a morning-culled bouquet,
Clustering, gazed on the rare display
Of sash and tunic and jaunty hat,
Heaped where Little Dolls' Dressmaker sat,

Herself and her ivory bench and chair
Veiled in the "golden bower" of her hair:

Thence peeped she often with smiles that stole
Like sunbeams into each baby soul.

"From daintiest patterns to be had
Shall each little darling's doll be clad,"
She said, as her scissors flashed and snipped,
And through soft meshes her needle slipped.

And while they waited, and while she wrought,
The tender shining of some sweet thought
Gilded her quaint little face; and then,
Softly as brooks sing, sang Jenny Wren:[1]—

SONG OF "LITTLE DOLLS' DRESSMAKER."

Ah! when I was a child, at night
Pain kept me oft awake;

[1] A quaint and tender character in Dickens's "Our Mutual Friend."

But I forgot it in desire
To see the morning break.

For then my blessèd children came
"In long bright slanting rows,"
With wheels of light above their heads,
And light all through their clothes.

I used to dress my little dolls
Like belles I saw at night
Flash from the steps of their carriage
Into the doorways bright.

But I could never fashion robes
Of that strange beamy white;
And, though I tried, could never make
Those wondrous wheels of light.

Down, down, through the golden weather
They bent like silver grain,
Saying softly, all together,
"Oh, who is this in pain?"

And, when I told them, they answered,
"Come, play with us!" and came
So close, I felt a strange delight
Fill all my feeble frame.

They looked at one another
When I cried, "I cannot play!"
With glimmer of their lily hands
Folded my work away,

And swept about me, and drew me
Into their bosoms bright,

Till their gentle warmth passed through me;
And, oh! "it made me light!"

And, when my children laid me down,
The old familiar pain,
The crutch, the care, the heaviness,—
I took them all again.

But, oh! the smell of "miles of flowers"
Where flowers never grew,
The tender cool of summer showers,
The scent of woodland dew,

Came in by the door and window;
And birds I could not see,
In time to faintly-beating wings,
Sang sweetest airs to me.

And when my blessèd children came,
And took me up to stay,
Lo! all the pain and heaviness
Forever fell away.

She paused, and rose from her ivory chair,
And stood in her "golden bower" of hair:
The children, pressing in eager rows,
Held out their arms for the tiny clothes.

Just then a flock of beautiful sheep,
Slowly followed by Little Bo-peep,
Came in by a door that stood ajar.
"Where, where are our tails?" they cried:
"Ba-a!"

With vine and brier and water-cress
Dear Little Bo-peep had fringed her dress:
Far she had raced over hills and dales
To find her poor sheep's beautiful tails.

She had spied them hanging o'er a brook;
Had pulled them down with her little crook:
Ten lovely tails of the whitest wool,
They crowded her crimson apron full.

"I cannot make them stay on," she sighed:
"I think they must have been too much dried."
Then bleated the sheep; and poor Bo-peep
Dropped all their tails, and began to weep.

Now, it happened that each little tail
Fell with her tears in a golden pail;

And Bo-peep's tears, like the hillside dew,
Curled them all up again good as new.

When out of the pail she saw them leap,
Each to its own particular sheep,
And fasten themselves, quite snug and true,
Exactly where they formerly grew, —

Oh! merrily laughed our shepherdess,
And wiped her sweet eyes, and smoothed her dress;
While those sly sheep, concealing surprise,
Furtively tried their tails, and looked wise.

Robin, with strawberry-leaves in his bill,
Gravely looked on from a window-sill;
Then sang, as touchingly as he could,
"Where are the babes, poor Babes in the Wood?"

"I know!" cried Little Red Riding-hood,
Trembling with eagerness where she stood:
"'They sobbed and sighed and bitterly cried,'
Poor little things! but they never died.

"It happened to-day, when on my way
To grandma's cot in the forest gray,
Where fairy hammocks of cobweb shine
Over the meadows of eglantine,

"Out of the sedges tufty and tall
I heard two soft little voices call,—
Faintly, poor darlings! for lack of food,—
'Don't you 'member poor Babes in the Wood?'

"Oh! quickly I gave them grandma's lunch,—
Ripe purple grapes in a juicy bunch,

And nice white slices of flaky bread,
With honey of clover thickly spread.

"Then I brought them in; and here they are,
And no more dead than the morning-star!"
She oped the skirt of her riding-hood,
And there those dear little cherubs stood.

"'Twas I," said Robin, tossing his head,
"'Brought strawberry-leaves, and over them spread.'"
"*Leaves!* But what did you do with the *berries*,
You that can dine all day on cherries?"

Now, when Red Riding-hood asked him that,
Poor Robin blushed, and looked for his hat;

But suddenly chirped, "Guess what I see
In plume and glitter all cap-à-pie?"

"Oh, good!" cried the girls: "here come the
boys!"
In they came trooping, with gleeful noise
Of drum and trumpet and shrill halloo,
Just as dear little boys love to do.

"Hurrah!" they cried, "for our Cornishman,
Who killed the wicked old Cormoran,
Two-headed Thundel, and Blunderbore,
And ever so many giants more!"

Jack showed them the cap that made him wise,
The coat that hid him from giants' eyes,
His sword that would cut the toughest things,
The shoes of swiftness that gave him wings.

Then — little Aladdin rubbing his lamp —
The children peeped into caverns damp
Where tinkling showers of gems untold
Poured into rivers of liquid gold,

And precious stones of every clime
Sparkled like eyes in the gliding slime,
And fountains bubbled from crystal wells,
And trees bore blossoms of pearly shells.

They saw far down how the hardy gnomes
Delve in the heart of their fiery homes.
Beautiful horses, with gentlest neigh,
Coal-black, cream-colored, white, and bay,

Shook their gay trappings, and pawed the ground;
While delicate wood-nymphs, daisy-crowned,

Mounted, and, sounding sweet Echo's horn,
Sped to the chase by the tasselled corn.

Ay, from the Dish that ran after the Spoon,
To the very Cow that jumped over the Moon,
To the Genii of the Lamp and Ring,
They showed the dear children every thing.

Jack's cousin, Jack of the famous Stalk,
Hearing the glee of laughter and talk,
Ran down his green ladder with the Hen
That laid the Gold Eggs for gentlemen.

The little girls made a nest of fleece;
And, while she laid them an egg apiece,
Jack, rumpling his hair to look more bold,
Such tales of delightful terror told!

And one that every good child believes,
Of Ali Baba and Forty Thieves;
And one no child can doubt in the least,
Of darling Beauty and her kind Beast.

And, when he had done, the children saw —
Her fair hand clasped in old Bruin's paw —
The loveliest maiden ever seen
Drive up in the coach of their Fairy Queen.

Under the holly-bough's berry-flame,
Into the palace parlor, they came.
"We're late," she said; "but dear Beast felt ill,
And waited to take a dragon-pill!

. . . . . .

"So pray don't mind his looking yellow, —
Poor Beast! — for he's a noble fellow."

Kindly the children replied, but gazed,
A little frightened, and much amazed.

Beast took a rose from his grizzly vest,
Kissed it, and laid it in Beauty's breast.
"I freely give back the price of life:
Farewell! since thou canst not be my wife,"

He said, and leaned on his paw, and sighed.
"Just like the story!" the children cried.
When Beauty asked them what she should do,
They all cried, "I would, if I were you!"

She laughed; and, turning, she kissed him quick:
Down fell the bear-skin in wrinkles thick;

And forth stepped, splendidly dressed and tall,
The handsomest fellow at the ball!

Then some one slyly called for King Cole,
With his fiddlers three, and his pipe and bowl:
The court musicians, taking the hint,
All began tuning, with eyes asquint.

The Prince came blithely to Liebling's side.
Quoth he, "Cinderella is our bride;
But"—and he smiled like a prince upon her—
"Liebling is chosen first Maid of Honor;

And all the court chamberlains have said
The Prince shall lead the dance with that maid."
And away the Prince with Liebling stepped:
The rest in circles around them swept.

As the court musicians softly played,
As wide and wider the circles swayed,
And sweeter the silver cymbals rung,
The Prince made sign, and the Princess sung:—

CINDERELLA'S SONG.

Once there were three sisters:
They were very wise and fair:
They kept their hands like lilies,
And powdered oft their hair.

One winter's night the sisters
Loudly began to call,—
"Oh, hurry, Cinderella,
And dress us for the ball!"

Poor Cinder's hair was lying
Thick in a golden curl:
Her sisters pulled it, crying,
"Ugh! what an ugly girl!"

She drew the lacings tighter;
She draped the lovely shawl;
She rubbed the jewels brighter;
She sweetly served them all.

Then came the Prince's carriage:
Away the sisters rolled.
"Dear me!" sighed little Cinder,
"How dark it is, and cold!"

She raked the lifeless ashes;
She saved the bits of coal;

Tears on her golden lashes,
And longing in her soul.

"My stars and silver garters!"
Cried a glad voice and sweet.
In whirled a queer old woman
Out of the windy street.

She waved her wand; and Cinder,
Dressed in a robe of green,
Sat in a pumpkin carriage
Fit for a royal queen.

Her blue eyes shone like dewdrops;
Her lovely golden curls
Danced on her pretty shoulders;
Her throat was clasped with pearls.

"Oh, joy! what joy!" cried Cinder.
The dame said, "Kiss me, sweet!"
And drew such tiny slippers
Of glass on Cinder's feet!

Six white mice in fairy's trice
Six milk-white steeds became.
"If the Prince has eyes, he'll lose
His heart," said little dame.

"I did!" cried the Prince; and off he rushed,
And kissed his bride till she finely blushed;
While Liebling, panting in dance-delight,
Still stepped the measure with all her might.

"Oh, look!" cried Liebling; and, lo! the floor
Changed in their midst to a dewy moor;
And there, with her brown feet bare and wet,
Sang and danced little Fanchon Fadet.

THE SHADOW-DANCE SONG.

I dance in the pleasant meadow,
In the fresh and waving grass;
And the arms of my own Shadow
Clasp me lightly as I pass.

They tell me I am so ugly,
No peasant will dance with me;
That I'm too bold and naughty.
I know not if it be.

But my Shadow's not so haughty:
  The moor is a ballroom free:
All day, all night, my heart is light;
  For the good God loveth me.

We trip it so well together,
  My still brown Shadow and I,
That up from the sweet wild heather
  The bees and the birdlings fly.

Oh! nearer and nearer coming,
  They hum and twitter and wheel:
"Zit-zee!" laugh the bees, low humming;
  "Twit-twee! what a jolly reel!"

Skip, skip! comes Monsieur Grasshopper;
  Hop! comes dear little Cricket:

Only tricksy Will-o'-the-wisp
Hides his lamp in the thicket.

Ever my Shadow awakes me
When the day is scarce begun;
Close, close, round my waist he takes me:
"Come out," he cries, "in the sun.

"Come out to our dance in the sun.
The dew is lingering yet:
Are you ugly or fair, all's one
To me, my Fanchon Fadet."

So my Shadow and I we kiss
In our veil of flying hair;
Or we dance, or we float like this,
He follows me everywhere.

She ceased, and out of the vanished moor
Sprang like a fawn to the marble floor;
She fled, and the laughing children chased;
She laughed, in their eager arms embraced.

And "Tell us how you do it!" they cried.
At their lips the merry accents died:
They gazed at each other, breathless, pale:
What meant that low and piteous wail?

"A child in pain on the Children's Night!
We will bring her in to joy and light."
They flew to open the doors, and stood
Peering into a lonesome wood.

The wind blew in with a gusty sigh,
And again they heard that mournful cry,
And saw in the gloom what seemed an elf
Tugging a bucket as big as herself.

She wept as she struggled on alone;
Her poor feet bled from the bruising stone;
Her tatters clung to her chill and wet:
"Oh, what shall I do?" sobbed no one's pet.

They ran to her, and so softly said,
As they led her in, "Don't be afraid:
You shall stay with us, and be our pet:
We will take care of you, little Cosette.[1]

See! Here are your clothes all sewed with flowers,
And shoes with spangles on just like ours;

[1] In "Les Misérables," Cosette, book iii., chap. v., Victor Hugo introduces in one of his most vivid pictures the infant Cosette alone at night in a gloomy wood, thrice overcome with childish terror of the dark, the burden of a great bucket of water which she can scarcely lift, and the fear of the Thenardiess if she does not return with the water speedily. This scene is now being effectively presented on the American stage in the play of "Cosette" as dramatized by Victor Hugo's son.

And you shall have saucer-pies and tarts,
And play be our little Queen of Hearts!"

The very kittens, to please Cosette,
Tangled themselves in a worsted net:
The squirrels hopped in her lap, — "Chut,
chut!"
Said they; "you'll find this a capital nut."

Cosette smiled shyly: 'twas rare to see
How bright a little one's smile could be,
As she clasped her doll, and curled her toes,
For joy to be in such dainty clothes.

Then swiftly, mistily stealing o'er,
A silver sheen enamelled the floor:
The same glad magic that instant put
A glittering skate on each nimble foot.

"Ha! what fun! Oh, isn't it nice!"
They called, as they skimmed the gleaming ice.
"A race! a race!" and one little girl
Shot swiftly out of the airy whirl.

Away o'er the ice so clear and blue,
Like a blithesome bird, that maiden flew:
Her scarlet kirtle and snooded hair
Like plumage gleamed in the frosty air.

Once, twice, and thrice, and the race was done,
And twice had the scarlet kirtle won.
"Bravo! bravo! but who can it be?"
"My skates shall answer you," murmured she.

She poised; then, leaning with flexile grace,
In curves, like meshes of dainty lace,

Wrote with her skates, as they flocked to see,
Three radiant letters, — M. M. D.![1]

"Welcome!" they cried in a ringing tone:
"It's darling Gretel! we might have known."
"Hark! what is that?" she whispered: and, lo!
The ice had vanished; and to and fro,

Gliding their flowering banks between,
The beautiful leaping waves were seen
To softly circle a fair green isle
That basked in the summer's tender smile;

And there, with whisper and foam and swirl,
They parted in winding steps of pearl.

[1] Mary Mapes Dodge, author of the charming story of "Hans Brinker, or The Silver Skates," of which little Gretel is the heroine.

A lovely child on that winding stair
Sat gathering lilies for her hair.

One hand through her glistening tresses slipped,
And one in the gliding wave she dipped.
The reeds kissed over her dimpling knee
As she warbled a song of the sea:—

UNDINE'S SONG.

All in the rosy-
  Red morning hours
They bade me to climb
  The coral towers.
"Alight," said they,
  "On yon bank of flowers.
Here are the rings
  For your bridal wrought,—

This for the bridegroom,
And this for you:
For gems like these must
That cave be sought
That lieth deepest
In ocean's blue.
Farewell, fisherman's
Lowly daughter!
Farewell, Sir Huldbrand's
Beautiful bride!
Nevermore may you
Roam the water, —
A castle's lady,
A husband's pride.
The Wave will obey
Your light control:
But you will be changed;
Will have a soul!"

I listened; I laughed;
I lightly sighed.
"And what is it like
To be a bride?
And what is a soul?"
I merrily cried.
But only "Farewell!"
The Wave replied.

The children called her. Gayly after,
In sweet roulade, came Undine's laughter.
She lifted her hands: a fairy bow
From her rosy fingers seemed to flow.

Then lightly, with twinkling feet, she ran
O'er its tremulous, soft, seven-tinted span;

Leaped from vanishing arch and water
Just as the eager children caught her.

"Dear Undine, say, is it nice to be
The little Crown Princess of the sea?"
They paused, and, clustering close, they gazed,
With beating hearts and sweet looks upraised.

Above them swelled a menacing sound
As of hoofs that tramped on hollow ground:
Oh! strange was that gallop in the air;
For they saw not horse nor rider there!

But Undine looked at them archly grave.
"You must know," she said, "that to the Wave,
From Zephyr's whisper to Tempest-tone,
The subtlest secret of Air is known.

"By viewless steeds when the air is pawed,
We know that Elf-land rideth abroad:
Some child has escaped their evil power,
And will be with us this very hour."

With many a gleaming swoop and wheel
The doves flew down from the snowy ceil:
They seemed to know dear Undine, and sung
Something to her in an unknown tongue.

She touched them with soft and loving hand.
"Yes; but the children can't understand,
Dear doves," she said: "they have never heard
That you are truly the children's bird.

"Dear children, the little doves can hear
Farther than any with mortal ear:

They have seen the Elves, and they have heard —
But listen: I'll tell you every word:" —

THE DOVES' SONG.

Not frae the summer-cloud,
And not frae the sea,
See we thy winsome guests
Hastening to thee.
Far down the dark glen — nay,
It is na the same
"Where late in the gloamin'
'Kilmeny' came hame."[1]
Yet bonny Kilmeny,
Sae pure and sae calm,
She leads little Alice,
To shield her frae harm.

[1] The little heroine of the Ettrick Shepherd's beautiful poem.

O'er heather of Eildon,
Sae purple and sweet,
We can hear the faint fa'
O' their lissome feet.
Ye ken the sad story,
As auld as the day
True Thomas the Rhymer
Was elvèd away;
How lost 'Alice Learmont,'[1]
Of far Ercildoun,
Lay under the fir-trees,
'Twixt starlight and dawn,
In her fond mother's arms,
In an elfin swoon.
How that mother embraced
Beast, serpent, and flame,
Yet held fast her darling

[1] Mrs. Dinah Mulock Craik's pathetic story of the fairy changeling.

In God's holy name,
Till, the elf-charm passing,
Her child in the morn
Lay pure on her bosom
As when she was born.
Hark! festal bells ringing
So faintly, so clear!
Ah! whom are ye bringing,
So lovely, so dear?
While festal doors, swinging,
Seem sighing, "Here, here!"

The air grew sweet with bloom of heather;
And there, like lilies, leaned together
Bonny Kilmeny with "een sae mild,"
And Alice, the love-saved elfin-child.

Sweet was their gentle welcome, and oft
Their lips were greeted in kisses soft.
"Supper must be 'most ready, I think:
Just hear how the spoons and glasses clink!"

They said, and turned to the banquet-hall,
When a dreadful roar dismayed them all.
Before them opened a forest lane;
And toward them rushing, with bristling mane,

Came a hungry lion, lean and wild;
And on him rode a beautiful child.
"Fear not," said Kilmeny.[1] O'er the sill
The monster plunged with a hungry will.

And yet not one little heart did quake:
All trusted the word Kilmeny spake.

[1] In the Ettrick Shepherd's poem, the child Kilmeny has power over the wild beasts, who become tame and gentle in her presence.

The lion leaped to Kilmeny's side:
He gazed on her, and his fury died.

He knelt, — for he could no longer stand, —
"And cowered aneath her lily hand."
She held her arms to the little one,
Who sat so calm on her dangerous throne.

The little one naïvely raised her head:
"Me velly, velly hungy," she said,
And down by the lion's shaggy lock
Slid in one shoe and a ragged frock.

Her bosom nestled a dewy rose
That made her tatters seem lovely clothes:
The soft pearl ring that little one wore
With love-light covered her o'er and o'er.

Wondering whence the little one came,
They gathered around, and asked her name.
In her tiny hands she tossed a wreath,
And thus she sang as she danced beneath:—

BETSINDA'S SONG.[1]

Little lion was my brudder;
Great big lioness my mudder:
Neber heard of any udder.
But I can dance, and I can sing;
I dot a wed wose and pearly wing;
And I can do all sorts of ting.
Dere, dat's all: 'n I'm glad me's done:
P'ease dive a dood dirl nice plum-bunn.

[1] The child-heroine of Thackeray's inimitable fairy romance, "The Rose and the Ring."

"It's little Betsinda!" they cried. "Ha, ha!
Welcome, little Highness of Crim-Tar"—
That moment, with swift and noiseless slide,
The doors of the banquet-hall rolled wide.

With snowy linen, and sweet white bread,
And fruits and flowers, were the tables spread.
Curds and whey and a silken tuffet
Were specially placed for little Miss Muffet.

A Christmas plum-pie at one corner
Waited the thumb of little Jack Horner.
The dining-chairs were of down and silk.
A slender fountain of sweet new milk

Rose from the centre, and, curving, poured
Its foamy streams in each carven gourd.

When all the children were seated there,
The lion came to Kilmeny's chair.

Oh, how the children laughed when they saw
The lion supping with spoon in paw!
"Oh, see!" sang little Betsinda, "see!"
And, lo! a wonderful Christmas-tree

Rose from the floor with a rustling noise,
Its green arms fringed with candles and toys.
With ringing hoof and jing-jing-jingle,
In reindeer sleigh, came good Kris Kringle.

Out hopped he in cap and jacket white;
"Hurrah! ha, ha! for the Children's Night!
A merry Christmas, my pets!" cried he,
And followed his cap to the top of the tree.

"Hurrah! ha, ha! what under the sun!
Why, here are presents for every one! —
A cymar of lilies white and chaste
For bonny Kilmeny's slender waist;

"For little Undine a soul is sent,
Full of all gladness and sweet content;
For little Fanchon, so brave and true,
This fadeless necklace of drops of dew;

"These silver skates for Gretel the good;
For darling Beauty, an azure snood;
For Cinderella, a crystal — muff;
For the Prince, he has *her*, — and that's enough;

"For Alice Learmont, a spotless dove,
And the memory of a mother's love;

For little Betsinda, another shoe, —
Perhaps she can dance as well in two;

"For little Liebling, in cloth of gold,
A wonderful book, in which is told —
But locked, my dears, till the morrow's light —
The history of the Children's Night.

"And now, my pets, for the mirror-show:
I'm master of magic, as you know.
My mirror is small, but deep and clear:
I promise you'll see strange things appear."

They gazed; and far in the mirror grew
The vision of one whose life was true,
By his noble air, the simple grace
That beamed from his careworn, gentle face.

He speaks: for a darling on his breast
Looks up listening, is closer pressed;
While upturned listening children's faces
Girdle his knees with tender graces.

On a white rose that touches the sill
The loveliest rose-elf rocks at will,
And from chair to keyhole skips and floats
The red-capped Nis with his bowl of groats.

And, dimly veiled in her long bright hair,
The sea-maiden leans on the speaker's chair:
Poor maid, with the gaze of cooing dove,
So happy in being dumb for love!

The children gazed in a breathless pause.
"Do you know him?" whispered Santa Claus.

"Ah, do we know him! dearest of men!
God bless our Hans Christian Andersen!

"The children's own friend!" they cried.
"Amen!"
Said Santa, low and devoutly: then
Over the vision's sweet face there came
The smile as of one who hears his name

Breathed in a blessing truly his own;
And the children heard in loving tone
Those sweetest words to little ones given,—
"For of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Listening, they saw the bright vision pass,
And Santa Claus shut the magic glass,
Then with his little finger lock it,
And stow it deep in his fur pocket.

"Now for our ride o'er the starlit snow!
Stretch, little sleigh, and away we'll go!"
At that the sleigh grew long as a car,
With lanterns that twinkled clear and far.

The reindeer were decked with tiny chimes
That cheerly tinkled "Good times! good times!"
He lifted them in, and far away
The children rode in Kris Kringle's sleigh.

. . . . . .

'Twas late when I stole up stairs and hid
The wonder-book in her coverlid,
And with simple gifts her stockings filled,—
My Liebling, loving and gentle-willed.

As morn drew nigh with its lighter rest,
I heard a rustle in Liebling's nest:
Yet dreaming, she clasped her book, and smiled.
"God give thee merry Christmas, my child!"

THE PRISONER.

For years upon his dungeon-floor
He sat, and counted o'er and o'er
The hopeless links, that, grim and fast,
Chained out the Future and the Past,
Trailing in rugged ruthless twist
Down to the ankle from the wrist,
Thence gliding, like a living thing
To grapple with an iron ring.
He sat and counted, vaguely smiling,
Himself with gibberish beguiling,
For years like this; and then one night,
Awaked as by a piercing call,
Aroused as by a blinding light,

With groping hands upon the wall,
He caught his breath, remembering all!

Save the hoarse rattle of his breath,
There fell long stillness deep as death.
Upward and fixed his bloodshot eyes;
His bosom strives with death-like sighs.
He feels no hope: but one desire
Now burns him with a growing fire,—
To climb and reach yon window-bar,
And, hanging thence, behold afar
The soft pale glimmer of a star,
Or stray white cloud afloat and free
Upon the morning's golden sea,
Or curling smoke of village fires,
Or glittering tips of distant spires,
And feel—oh nameless ecstasy!—
Descending from the radiant skies,

To breathe upon his weary eyes,
The ministering Angel of the Air;
To feel her light and close embrace,
Her silent kisses on his face,
Her viewless fingers lift his hair,
As through his trance of helpless woe
Her sweet mysterious whispers flow;
To hear, far down, the hollow boom
Of waves that beat his living tomb, —
The free wild waste that ever glides,
Its restless surge and sounding dash
Changed only for the softer plash
And murmur of receding tides.

He gazes, gropes, and, crouching, springs.
His chain clanks harshly on the walls:
He clutches wildly, clasps and clings
To empty air, and moans and falls;

There pants a little while, and then
Attempts the hopeless toil again;
And many times, for many days,
The ever-baffled task essays.

Against the wall, his vigor spent,
He leans, an old man, gray and bent,
With hands, that, locked in gusts of pain,
Shake sullen murmurs from his chain.
He sits and broods with bended head:
Despair has gnawed him to the core:
"There is no God! or God is dead!"
He mutters, and looks up no more.

But suddenly the silence heard
The carol of a little bird,
Far up: alighting on the sill
With faintest whir of folding wing,

Between the bars its little bill
Of clearest chirp and tuneful trill
Poured forth its pearly twittering.

Its song was like a happy heart
That could not bear its joy alone,
But gushed and bubbled: never art
Attained such miracle of tone.

Like trembling crystal bells, each note,
Responsive to a silvern tongue
Suspended in its swelling throat,
In breath-vibrations softly swung.

It sang and sang, until the lay
Its bounding heart could not repress
By faint gradations sank away,
Hushed sweetly in its own excess.

He looks not up, but through his tears,
In speechless tension listening, hears,
A moment plumed with gentle care,
The rustling flutter of the wing
By which the free and heavenly thing
Sails o'er the silver seas of air.

So deeply sank the artless strain,
His soul forgot the clanking chain:
Only a shudder told he knew
The moment when the minstrel flew.

He casts himself upon the floor,
His cold cheek to the colder stone:
His heart, though desolate and sore,
Cries inly, with a patient moan, —
"God is, and God is love alone:
I will have faith forevermore!"

Hour after hour the sad one lay,
In silence rapt, as in a swoon.
From languid arms of sleeping noon
To evening slipped the waning day,
And blushed along the prison-bars;
Above, the glimmering Milky Way
Unrolled its wide white belt of stars.

He tries to rise, but only kneels;
For with new solemn joy he feels
In laboring chest and falling breath
The promise of the angel Death.
Cold dews upon his forehead start;
His lips in trembling whispers part:—

"Ah me! who knows? perhaps that little bird
Has sung in distant bowers where *she* has heard,—

Has heard, alas! and never dreamed that strain
Was the one break in my long night of pain.

"Sometimes I fancy that sweet breast of thine
Gives nightly rest to other head than mine.
Sweet wife! lost wife! so sweet, so lost to me!
If this be true, I would not I were free.
So dear I loved thee, darling, ah! so well,
That here, forsaken, in this dreadful cell,
I could wish only good, yea, *any* good, to thee!
I would not have thee live alone as I,
Nor in such solitude as mine to die.
Thou wouldst not know me if to-day I stood
Freed from my shackles and my solitude.
I can, in fancy, see the tender grace
With which thou wouldst avert thy pitying face,
Nor think one moment of the mournful truth,
Nor deem such wreck the lover of thy youth.

"This bent and shaking form, this whitened hair,
This brow o'erwritten by the hand of care,
And pale with such unspeakable despair
As leaves death's livid impress there;
These cheeks with hollows scooped by scalding tears
And the slow famine of the heart for years,
In which no human voice, no light of day,
Pierced the dim dungeon in whose depths I lay, —
This is the story nothing else can tell
Like the stern rigors of the prison-cell.

"There was a time, long since, I raved,
And night and day unceasing craved
For death to reach me in this tomb
Of loneliest silence, rayless gloom.

But human love, nor tears, nor prayers,
Can enter here, or hence depart:
There is but One who knows or cares
For this forgotten breaking heart.

"But now the dreadful strain is past:
O dungeon, thou must yield at last!
Would, dearest, thou wert gone before
To meet me on life's farther shore!
But yet, whatever change betide,
True hearts forever true abide;
And somewhere in that blessed life
We shall be sure to meet, sweet wife!"

His half-freed spirit, deeply wrought,
Sublimely poised in quickened thought,
Lifts suddenly the partial mist
Where memory keeps eternal tryst.

Before his soul, as in a glass,
A train of gentle phantoms pass.
Oh holy vision! In the dim
Far dawn his mother smiles on him:
He feels her bosom softly rise,
Her kisses on his lips and eyes;
In her bright hair his dimpling hands,
Unchided, twist the silken strands;
While he, in rosy infant charms,
Once more lies nestling in her arms.

The greensward in the setting sun;
The eager play when school was done;
The little girl who pulled his hair,
And, when he kissed her, cried, "No fair!"
Swift set her little buskin down,
And pushed him from her with a frown,

Yet smiled and blushed a moment after,
O'er-rippling in coquettish laughter;

To whom he used to shyly bring
The earliest blossoms of the spring,
The nuts he gathered when the year
Put on her gold and purple gear.
Ah, how she took, with simple grace,
His humble gift as homage due,
And flashed across his dazzled face
Her thankless eyes of sparkling blue!

At length, most near, most like to life,
The image of his girlish wife, —
The graceful shape, the beaming eye,
The warm lips parted musingly,
The white young arms upon her breast
Crossed in the guise of guileless rest, —

They weave a dream of other days.
He could believe his loss a lie,
So clear her fixed and loving gaze:

Though something in the soft still beam
Transcends the purport of a dream;
And, while he feels that death is kind
To yield such visions to his mind,
His eyes with swift sweet wonder shine, —
Their lifted gaze no prison-walls confine!

The night passed on, and at break of day
They pushed from his cell the bolts away.
"He sleeps," they said; but he lay so still,
Their hearts were stirred with a prescient thrill.
"Awake! arise! *thou art free!*" they cried.
The dungeon echoes alone replied.

THE LYRIC OF THE LILIES.[1]

AMONG THE LILIES.

Beautiful Lucy Ashton,
  Lift up your lily hand
To where the milk-white lilies,
  Pallid and slender, stand.

O pallid, slender lilies!
  Up, up from the margin green —
Graceful as Ganymede,
  Stately as maiden queen —

[1] From "Bard of Abbotsford," in Harper's Monthly.

Rise like the shaft
Of a fairy tower,
Rise like a shaft,
But bend like a flower
  Each snowy cup,
Till the bubbling spring
  With dewy draught
  Shall fill it up.
Bend, lilies, dip,
And tremble, and sway,
And, dipping, swing
To her rosy lip
The foam-fine spray,
That she may sip.

The lips that drink
  Young Love has kissed;
The Spring's green brink
  Is young Love's tryst;

And draught more sweet,
More pure, more meet,
Was never quaffed
On sweeter summer's day.
O sun, that touched her golden head!
O flowers, that loved her lightsome tread!
O breeze, that laughed
Upon her rosy lip, and rung
With gentle echoes if she sung!
Are all thy charm and beauty fled?
Sweet days, soon sped!
Sweet love, soon dead?
Ah, no! too dear to pass away.

THE TRYST.

The deer are in the woodlands;
The birds are on the wing;

The June hath clad in roses
The moss-green robes of Spring.
Fair is young Lucy Ashton,
Waiting by the spring;
Fair are the marble lilies;
Fair is every thing.

Blue are the eyes of Lucy, —
Blue as the summer sea,
And full of the changing charm of the sea;
As suddenly shy, as purely bold,
Afoam with fancies too fine to be told;
Fancies so delicate, pure, and free,
They seem revealing, above disguise,
Her very heart in her lovely eyes,
When over them swift, in fold on fold,
The baffling waves of reserve are rolled;
And in them lies,

In place of the sparkle and beam and flash,
A weary sweep of the silken lash,
And vague surprise,
That slowly glides into thought as deep
As the deep, dark wave, whose shadows keep
The sea's sad mysteries in sleep,
Whence secrets never rise;
Eyes ever and always like the sea;
Most like when the sea, in lulls or blows,
In a countless glory of glimpses shows
How lovely heaven may be.

Fresh breezes, waft
Faint fragrance to her;
Beat, beat his face
To a blush apace
Who comes to sue her.

Bold Love, stir his heart
  Till its throbs are blows;
Shy Love, try thine art
  Till it paints the rose
  Of a thousand glows
On a cheek that was pale;
Blow, breeze, to a gale,
  With frolicsome ways;
  Fan, fan to a blaze
The sweet cheek that was pale;
  Else Love will disclose
  That she knows — that she knows —
  Who is coming to woo her!

THE PARTING.

O Lucy! Lucy Ashton!
  Listen, before you speak;

At Edgar's coming — *once* — thy heart
Sent rosy welcome to thy cheek.
But now how silent, cold, and pale!
Thine eyes their trembling lashes veil!
Look up, O tender, downcast eye,
That cannot look in mine — and lie!
If that thou wearest on thy breast
Has ceased to thrill as Edgar's token,
Return it from its fickle rest:
'Tis but a heart outraged and broken
Thou wilt be giving back to me,
If thou, that parted coin returning,
Canst say it has no charms for thee.

I will not take thy mother's word:
She is too heartless, proud, and cold.
If it be *true* thou lovest no more,
'Tis by *thy* lips I will be told.

O glowing lips that I have kissed!
O sweet and lovely eyes!
No word! no look!—in signs like these
A fatal meaning lies.

[*She gives the coin.*]

'Tis, then, thy wish, thy deed! Alas
That heart so false could beat
Within a breast so fair! I thought
Not heaven could be more sweet.
And canst thou really wish it so?
But, ah! thy silence bids me go.
O treacherous, fatal loveliness!
So tender still thy spell,
Love cannot speak its deep reproach.
Farewell, dear love!—farewell!

He rode, unheeding, in the storm: the night
Infolded him in ever-deepening gloom.

His noble head drooped on his struggling breast,
Where broken trust and wounded love's unrest
Wrought in his faithful heart their mournful blight:
Thus grief and night prepared his lonely doom.

For Edgar, Lord of Ravenswood,
All day in vain they sought.
When sun was set in hue of blood,
A stranger tidings brought.
On yonder quicksand's dizzy maze,
Found by his favorite groom,
Only the young lord's velvet cap
And matted sable plume.

THE LILIES — ALONE.

On earth beneath, in heaven above,
Is aught more dear, more pure, than love?

Can aught so perfect have an end?
Ask where the slender lilies bend.
No more by yon deserted spring
Close-clasping hands, eyes glistening,
Fond, hurried vows, fond listening;
Warm lips, love-thrilled,
Young hearts, hope-filled,
All trust and truth,
That is so new,
Yet seems not strange.
O heart of youth!
What loves like you,
Defying ruth,
Unfearing change?
Can aught so perfect have an end?
Ask where the pallid lilies bend.

Year after year, o'er yonder spring,
The wild bird floats on tinted wing;

The sky still drops its curtain blue;
The sun its morning cup of dew
Sips slowly, with a beaming smile
That rifts the quiet forest aisle.

The path where shine and shadow meet,
Once lightly pressed by little feet,
Is tenderly o'erlaid with flowers.
A fading rainbow in the mist
With silence keeps the lovers' tryst
Through slowly-flitting summer-hours.

A sunny beauty reigneth here:
Its ripe perfections, far and near,
In forms and hues and perfumes blend.
But, oh! more perfect, pure, and dear,
The beauty of the young hearts' truth

That kept the tryst one little year, —
The sweet, sweet love of early youth.
Alas! can aught so perfect end?
Alone the empty lilies bend.

HARP OF THE NORTH.[1]

(AUG. 15, 1771–1871.)

UPON the banks of cloud-land wide and fair,
Washed by the golden river of the air,
The burning soul of bounteous Summer sleeps,
While vernal Earth her ardent vigil keeps.
In the pure spaces of the Northern sky
A growing wonder thralls my gazing eye:
I see a cloud of softest rosy light
Unroll its beauty in a landscape bright, —

[1] From "Bard of Abbotsford," in Harper's Monthly, a contribution to the literature of the Scott centennial celebration in August, 1871.

A broidery of mountain, vale, and stream,
Wrought on the bosom of a captive beam;
With temples framed of lily leaf and rose,
Their pillars fashioned of auroral glows,
So matchless fine and delicate, they seem
The lovely structure of an angel's dream;
And all as if that angel leaned to paint
  Her heavenly dream upon enchanted air,
Ere yet the shapes and colors growing faint
  Could mock an angel's memory and care.

The vision changed: the scene remained the
    same;
  Yet o'er the emerald vale and sparkling
    river
A curious magic, as of heatless flame
  In lambent colors, seemed to flow and
    quiver.

The scene the same, but wondrous spell is wrought:

Awe gathers awe in heaven-aspiring thought.
What seemed a landscape passing fair is yet
A shining harp 'mid azure mountains set.
The hills are hills, and yet the harp they frame;
The temple's pillars, strings of twisted flame,
So fine and slender that a wandering sigh
Would softly wake their far and sweet reply.
The floating gossamer of earthly vales,
Webbed in the unseen loom of earthly gales,
Were fittest fabric for an Ariel's wings
To start the music of those radiant strings.

Hark! every sense waits on the listening ear:
The harp vibrates, and these the strains I hear,
As by a minstrel's hand, that, free and strong,
Knows how to woo and win the soul of song:—

THE MINSTREL'S LAY.

Love is the loveliest thing in heaven;
And e'en to mortal love 'tis given
To pierce the veil, and reach the ears
Tuned to the music of the spheres.
Such earthly love had gentle power
To enter a celestial bower,
And win me to its festal hour.
A sweetness pulsed in brazen girth
Shakes summer gladness o'er the earth;
A far, faint melody of bells
My nation's fond remembrance tells.
O thou dear country of my birth!
  Scarce did I think the simple song
Thy minstrel thought of little worth
  Would be remembered half so long.
My spirit thanks thee, hovering down
Upon "mine own romantic town."

Since it is o'er, I would not try
  Mine earthly pilgrimage again:
Yet, mine once more to live and die,
  It should be to a nobler strain
Of effort, patient, pure, and true,
To lead the world to higher view;
So Faith could yield my latest breath,
Without a question, unto Death,
And I be sure my house of clay
Was all of me that *need* decay,
And thus — as now, when bending down
Above "mine own romantic town" —
Could feel mine earthly life and lays
Not all unworthy of its praise.

More weak my hold of heaven is growing;
The charm of earth is round me flowing;

The tender incense of the hour
Hath touched me with its olden power.
Once more, as one of mortal mould,
I seem to pass o'er hill and wold:
Swift as itself, thought takes me far,
By wooded shores of Vennachar,
To rugged crest of Benvenue,
Repeated in Loch Katrine's blue,
And through the wild and lovely way
Of Trasach's Glen to Loch Achray.

Still running fast by Cambusmore,
Each wave its fellow tumbling o'er,
The reckless Keltie leaps the ridge,
To plunge in pearls 'neath Bracklinn's bridge;
From Tinto Hills the brooklets glide
To swell the stream of stately Clyde;

And these the winds that hurry o'er
The lonely wilds of Lammermoor;
The Esk and Almond, Leith and Tyne,
As in a silver braid intwine
With broader strands, whose fertile green
Spreads many a blooming heath between.

The laughters of a hundred rills
Make music in the Cheviot Hills;
Only less sweetly flows along
The Ettrick than its "Shepherd's" song;
And Hills of Eildon, cloven in three
By will of ancient wizardry,
With triple summit pierce the air
O'er Melrose ruins, "sad and fair,"
And Abbotsford!—no other name
Could thrill me with a gentler flame,—

Where o'er its "milk-white pebbles" speed
The glimmering ripples of the Tweed.

O bonny Scotland! cliff and glen
And brae and lake look fair as when
A little bairn I dreamed beside
The Tweed and Teviot's mingled tide,
Or left lang syne the toilsome desk
To wander by the singing Esk,—
Look fairer; for a spirit's eye
Their deeper beauties can espy.

Still does the mirth of Scottish bell
A minstrel's name and praises swell.
Farewell, "my own, my native land!"
Music thou mayst not understand,
In which the sweetest sound of earth
Were lost the instant of its birth,

This moment down the ether fell:
It breaks the transient earthly spell,
Recalls me to a lovelier shore,
And my brief hour with thee is o'er.

The distant ripples of the Tweed —
Last sounds of lessening earth I heed —
Are lost in the celestial speed
Given only to the angel-band, —
The power unspeakable and grand
By which the paths of air are spanned,
That conquers time and endless space,
And bears me in its deep embrace,
With motion of angelic grace,
By flowing cloud and whirling sphere,
Through fields of ether, pure and clear
As gentlest angel's pitying tear,
To perfect love and life and rest, —

The tenants of an angel's breast,
The threefold being of the blest.

As if the latest breath the minstrel drew
With music had inspired its quivering frame,
Melodious shudderings shook the harp-strings through,
And softly gave the spirit-minstrel's name.
Then shining harp and landscape spreading bright,
Slow-fading dream of beauty, slid from view;
And but a cloud of softest rosy light
Rode far and lightly in the Northern blue.

ON THE SANDS.

THOU hast forsaken me!
In these strange words my sorrow lies.
O'er the wide sea, unrolling blue,
Where once I sailed and sang with you;
O'er the wide earth, unfolding green,
O'er all the fresh, familiar scene, —
The mocking, fragrant, smiling land,
The curving, mutable sea-sand,
The shining scroll of arching skies, —
Where'er I turn my searching eyes,
I read the sentence burning clear
From sea and earth and atmosphere;

The words wherein my poor heart dies,
Wherein my balmless sorrow lies, —
"Thou hast forsaken me!"

I know not wherefore, know not whither:
I only know you come no more;
I only say it o'er and o'er.
And yet my inmost heart replies,
Repulsing me with bursting sighs, —
"He is not false! you tell me lies!"
Oh hapless heart! for still it grieves,
Still cries for you, and still believes.

That time, that happy time, which flew,
When I believed your love was true,
Has vanished, — followed after you.
Thou hast forsaken me, alas!
This time is dead; it will not pass:

Nor can I find the self I lost
That died when I was left alone.
This time is dead; it will not pass:
It hangs upon me like a ghost, —
A ghost that never will be gone.

How pale the face that in the past
Used, like a rose-warm dream of bliss,
To redden with a lover's kiss, —
The kiss of love! It did not last:
I died, and thou didst come to me,
Where I lay dead beside the sea,
Dear ghost of what can never be.

I pray you, gentle ghost, depart
For, oh! you chill me to the heart.
My bosom cannot bear your head:
It sinks into my heart like lead.

You freeze the little hands you hold:
You were so sweet! you are so cold!
Now I am dead, you should not keep
My poor heart from its sacred sleep.
Alas! you are more chill than death:
I tremble in your icy breath.
I did not know we breathed when dead:
I thought with life all motion fled;
I thought in death no tears were shed,
And in the grave no word was said.

At last I see that death is but
A door in darkness swiftly shut,
A dropping out of warmth and light,
A sense of unresisted blight,
A sinking into beamless night.
To life and love and sight and sound
Death is indifference profound.

No more sweet hope, or wild despair,
Or gentle rest, or tender care;
No more to laugh, no more to weep,
No more sweet human joy or grief:
Only a calm beyond belief;
A calm, but *not* the calm of sleep!
Death is to be awake forever!
To love, and be belovèd never!
To be a pulseless shadow, hurled
Down the dim gulf that spheres the world;
Tranced in a maze of tintless thought,
Where nought is found, and nothing sought;
Slipped from warm life's remotest link,
Death is supremely this, — to think!

I sit upon the wide, lone beach,
And watch the inward-rolling sea;

As far as any eye can reach,—
The sky, the sea, the sand, and me.

God help me! for there seems to be
Design in all this misery;
Something that binds me to the rack,
Nor helps me on, nor yields me back,
But holds me with a desperate strain
To the full tension of my pain.

One day came toward me where I lay,
Rock-sheltered on the glistening sands,
A figure of a noble grace,
And paused by me, with folded hands,
And grave, sweet pity on his brow;
But kept the silence as a vow.

I saw him, though I looked away;
I felt his eyes upon my face.
I knew him not, nor cared to know;
Nor could I tell if it were grief,
Or subtler pang of late relief,
That in the silence seemed to grow.

I turned, and raised my heavy eyes:
I thought their looks would bid him go,
And strove to mask them in disdain.
He answered me with heavy sighs,
That strangely touched my callous woe.
His folded hands, his bended head,
He moved not, nor a word he said;
Till, held occultly to the spot,
I felt rush o'er me, swift and hot,
The first mad tempest of my pain.

I sprang, yet leaned upon the rock,
Dumb for an instant in the shock,
Then cried, I know not what or how:
This only I remember now:—
He took my hands: e'en then I knew
The unfamiliar clasp was true;
His face, wherein there was no guile,
Bent o'er me with a heavenly smile;
And low, in earnest accents, came
One gentle utterance of my name.

I could not heed: 'twas nought to me.
I heard, as it were wounded sore,
The sea-heart beating on the shore,
And saw the sands reel to the sea,
The sky swerve like a shivered dome,
And felt the winds, borne far and free
From frolic with the flying foam.

I was too desolate to care
That love's vast patience waited there;
But when I felt with inward start
My cold hands gathered to his heart,
And burning tears that were not mine
Fall o'er them in a rain divine,
I gazed in mute and thrilled surprise
Into the pity of his eyes.

He said, "O noble woman-heart!
Too tender, too divine thou art,
Thus for a faithless love to break.
Dear heart, from whom false love hath flown,
You thought to break, and die alone!
But you will live for true love's sake, —
True love, that never fails its own.

"The small soul's little love, that stole
The spring-time sweetness of your soul,

Was true love's counterfeit in clay,
The fickle fever of a day,
That could not choose but pass away.

"I loved you when your joy was new;
And violets leafing in the dew
Are not more sweet in early spring
Than was your beauty's blossoming.

"I loved you for the very glow,
The truth and fervor, of your joy;
For love, though wrung in torture's throe,
If it be love, cannot destroy.

"But now, though all your comeliness
Lies in the cloud of wan distress,
Its rosy charm and sparkle o'er,
I love you better, love you more.

"I would have saved you, — yielded life
To make you happy as his wife;
Had it been possible, I would:
Love so desires the utmost good.

"But I am thankful that I know —
Ay, by the pain that I have borne
In knowing this dear bosom torn —
What grace is possible to woe.

"The wanness of your cheek to me
Is lovelier than its bloom could be;
For under this pale frost of care,
As blossoms under winter-snows,
Life holds and will fulfil the rare
Sweet promise of its later rose.

"I hold it is the destiny
All other happy fates above

To be a man who shall be fit
To win a noble woman's love.

"You know my heart. I cannot tell
If you will love me soon or late:
But there is faith in my farewell;
And love is strong to hope, and wait.

"This only, dear one, I entreat:
If ever your true heart is mine,
My waiting hope you will complete,
And send my waiting love its sign."

He paused, and kissed and loosed my hands,
Nor once looked back across the sands.
I clasped the hands that he had kissed,
And went home slowly in the mist.

Where Self had made me blind, Love touched
my eyes
With her great prophecy of Paradise.
The legions whom we call the lost I saw
Rise everywhere as from the depths of night,—
Pale creatures of unutterable blight,
In solemn groups, their faces crossed with
awe,
Their hollow eyes fixed on a wondrous light
That seemed to draw them to its inmost ray,
Melting the shadows from their souls away,
Lifting them gently to the promised day;
And in their midst, while all around, above,
The air shone like the whiteness of a dove,
And strains of music, soft, inspiring, sweet,
Through all the glorious vision seemed to
beat,
Hate, born of ignorance, lay dead — of Love!

I felt the world weighed down with heavy care,
And heard sad cries in darkness everywhere;
And heard them, as *I* would be heard in prayer,
With large, sweet pity, taking instant share
Of the great burden of the laboring earth,
Holding one lifted heart of greater worth
Than scores of hopes and joys of selfish birth.

I cared for every pain, and judged no sin,
Remembering ever what I might have been,
Had I been tempted, goaded, spurned, the same;
And grew to see and feel the utter shame
Of feebly dying, careless of the strife,
The infinite entanglement of life,
And heedless of the solemn claims that call
The utmost services of each and all.

The days passed on until a year had flown;
And. when the year was gone, one glorious night, —
A tender trance of dusk infused with light, —
While Earth lay girdled in her sapphire zone,
And Summer drowsed upon her moonlit throne,
I, sitting in my window all alone
With inmost thought, a weighty vigil kept,
And searched my heart, and smiled and sighed and wept;
And, smiling, sighing, weeping, felt no sorrow,
But often whispered to myself, "To-morrow!"

I heard, in fitful music sweet and rare,
The tuneful pulses of the summer-air;
And thought and listened, till I saw afar
The passing, paling night, the waning star;

Until the dawn, arising pure and white,
Leaned like a lily from the eastern height.

I stood a moment in the lovely ray;
Then, like the dawn, *I* put the night away:
With earnest heart, and willing, trembling hands,
I wrote, "To-day — at sunset — on the sands."
Tears came between me and the simple line:
Did love still wait for its delaying sign?

At last I laid me down in tranquil mind,
Gliding through gentle dreams to golden noon;
Then slumber loosed me, and I rose to find
The earth grown perfect in the smile of June.
The air was thrilled with sweetest uttering
Of birds, in scent and sunbeam fluttering;
The brooks trilled softly, and the summer breeze
Blew cool and fragrant from the swaying trees.

I put my fairest garments on with care,
And set a white rose in my burnished hair;
And like one ransomed I went down the stair,
And by the little paling mossed and brown,
Beyond the gate, and through the quiet town,
And reached the sea before the sun went down.

There were the rocks, uplifted clear and grand
From their gray shadows in the sheltered sand;
And there the sea, in softest west wind fanned,
Rolled wide its sparkling crescent on the strand.

Before the ruddy glances of the sun
The filmy wreaths of vapor seemed to run;
Till, fused, transformed, and now no longer flying,
They seemed, in groups of graceful shapes unrolled

Upon the bosom of a lake of gold,
A fleet of rose-hued ships at anchor lying.

Already, in the old familiar place,
My lover waited by the changeful sea:
He turned, and, in that instant seeing me,
Came quickly, took my hands, and searched my face,
And read my heart there in a moment's space.
Then saying low, "Thank God!" (I never heard
Such sweet and strong thanksgiving in the word),
He clasped me in a tender, close embrace.

The setting sun went down into the sea,
And one by one the stars came silently,
Through soft harmonious shadows looking down,
Like gentle, patient eyes through lashes brown,
On sea and curving beach and sleeping town.

The white-winged moonlight glimmered on the sand,
Where heart to heart we sat, and hand in hand.
Too thrilled and filled with love for frequent speech,
We heard the wind and wave upon the beach
Their olden liquid love-song singing cheerly:
The wind ran down the shore with furtive feet,
On tiptoe sung, "I love you, — love you dearly!"
The wave ran up, and, kneeling, kissed her feet,
And answered her, "I love you, — love you, — sweet!"
I never heard the duo sung so clearly.

At length he asked me, "Did it need the year
Before the wish was felt to bid me here?
Or did your dear heart earlier incline,
Yet fear to trust me with the blessed sign?"

And thus I answered him: "One year ago,
With trembling step and melancholy eye,
A poor, forsaken creature, crazed with woe,
Sick of a mortal wound, came here to die.

"Day after day she lingered here alone:
The sea-weed, wind-whipped from the flashing spray, —
A moment fiercely whirled, then cast away, —
Lay not more lifeless on the lichened stone.

"She knew it not, but there was one who cared,
Whose noble heart her silent sorrow shared, —
One who believed in her, though she despaired;
So trusted in her nature, that he gave
His perfect love without reserve to save
The life so sadly sinking to the grave;

Gave all, and left her free, and then apart
Waited the new awakening of her heart.

"O friend! O generous one! who understood,
As only one so strong and tender could,
And, with such stainless faith in womanhood,
Invoked her nature to its highest good:
You could not trust her thus, and trust in vain!
She who was dying turned to life again
To learn the nobler uses of its pain.

"I know I let you go without reply:
I had no words but seemed too poor to say;
And, when I tried, it seemed my heart would burst;
But in the beauty of your beaming eye
I felt the dreadful stupor pass away.

"Your tears — they thrilled me with a holy thirst,
A great desire to live, and, living, prove
I could be worthy of your blessed love;
And, oh! I loved you, — loved you from the first.

"Nay, hear me yet" (but now I told the rest
Clasped warmly to the shelter of his breast):
"I, who had been so miserably weak,
Was yet too loyal to your trust to speak;
Was yet too truly proud, too proudly true,
To give the dregs of womanhood to you.

"Tired of life's wounds, I longed to lay my head
On your true heart, and there be comforted,
And give the struggle o'er; and yet I knew,
While the great longing thrilled me through and
through,
A woman of a nature sweet and whole,

Perfect in culture, of all high control,
Should bring love's answer to your manly soul.

"And so I let you pass, yet ill could brook
The steadfast sweetness of your parting look;
And from that hour, with all my might, I tried
To put the sloth of selfish self aside;
And what my earnest seeking found to do
I did, with all my strength, in thought of you.
And when the year was done" —

"You sent the sign
That slid like music from your heart to mine.
Sweet are your eyes, — so tenderly they shine
With the pure radiance of loving thought;
Your looks are fair, — in every gentle line
The beauty of your noble life is wrought.
Surely no dream of heaven is more divine

Than the dear presence of a loyal woman.
Some subtile sadness thrills a joy so fine:
Dispel it, love, with those rare smiles of thine;
Make me with kisses feel that you are human."

Oh tender joy of love,
Whose silent blisses
Feel there's no heaven above
Love's perfect kisses!

The starry glory of the skies
Is fair to see:
A deeper light in love-lit eyes
Shineth for me.

Oh far remove from death!
Oh heaven, o'erlying strife!

We reach, with bating breath,
Unto this crown of life!

Oh far remove from death!
So far it seems a lie—
The fear of craven hearts—
That they who love can die!

Oh perfect crown of life!
Invested king and queen,
We cope with any fate,
Invincible,—serene.

The golden feet of flying hours
Came toward us down the shining night,
And sweet as breath of passing flowers,
And swift as sunlit April showers,

Fled on in music and in light.
O beauty of the calm wide night!
O rhythm of the sounding sea!
Harmonious with the deep delight
That sets the springs of being free,
We felt your voices one with ours;
We knew the theme was love, and we
Full chords of one great symphony!

The years have passed; they have been full
and sweet:
Love maketh life and life's great work complete.
Some time will come the setting of the sun,
And this brief day of the long work be done.
There will be folded hands, lips without breath;
But *we* shall have passed on: Love knows no
death!

THE VOICE OF CHRISTMAS PAST.[1]

(JUNE 8, 1870–DEC. 24, 1870.)

BRING holly-leaves of polished green:
The Christmas-feast is bravely set;
And over all the earth, I ween,
The countless Christmas-guests are met.
The sunlit air is throbbing fast
With gleeful clang of Christmas-bells:
One smote them in the festal past
To cheer sad hearts in prison-cells.

[1] From "The Voice of Christmas Past," a tribute to Charles Dickens, in Harper's for January, 1871.

The world demands surcease of strife,
And claims the year's last week of life.

The ruddy wine, so rare to sip,
  In joyous laugh and airy jest
Is born upon the glowing lip,
  And wit hath wings from guest to guest.
Yet oft o'er all is overspread
The halo of a sainted death,
  And mirth's gay chords fall out of tune:
The glossy holly overhead
Emits the sweetest phantom-breath
  Of roses culled in early June!

The shadow of a great name lies
On pensive brows, in thoughtful eyes;
The memory of a great heart swells
Each bosom where his image dwells.

The carol of the poor he sung;
The sick, imprisoned, suffering, vile,
Had mighty champion in his tongue,
Nor sinned beyond his tender smile.

O faithful voice of "Little Nell"!
O holy thoughts of "Tiny Tim"!
Sound ever in the organ's swell,
Ring ever in the Christmas-bell,
Inspire the universal hymn!

O purity and truth and worth!
One noble spirit sought you long:
In bloom of deeds array the earth,
And keep his memory green in song!

While the "rare old plant," the ivy, climbs,
And wreathes the tongues of his silent chimes.

EVENING HYMN.[1]

TO JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER ON HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY.

PROPHET and child of God, —
Thou who hast meekly trod,
Unconscious of its worth,
A glorious way on earth! —

Now, when the sun doth lie
Low in the autumn sky,

[1] See Whittier's beautiful poem, "My Triumph," upon which this was modelled, and to which this is a response.

Softly, as earth grows dim,
Love breathes thine evening hymn.

Sweet Singer of the Past!
Thy tender songs shall last
While yet one soul in pain
Behind thee shall remain.

Ardent to "right the wrong"
Rose thy brave, truthful song,
Whose sweeter words unsung
Yet found in deeds a tongue.

Thy better wish, unwrought,
Still fed thy noble thought,
And knit thy generous mind
More closely to thy kind.

The "airs of heaven" blown o'er thee,
The "glory" set before thee,
O'er all shall blow and beam
The sooner for thy "dream."

Bard of a race oppressed,
Thou, by all sufferers blessed:
Still let thy "dream" unfold;
Go not till all is told.

Close to the Silent Gate
Friends gone before thee wait,
While they still here behold
Thy white locks lit with gold.

Oh, may the mists that fall
Chill at pale Azrael's call
Shrink from thy closing day,
Cloud not its shining way!

While singing to the last,
Mayest thou, earth's care o'erpast,
Tenderly aureoled
Enter the age of gold!

Still shalt thou be a voice,
Bidding all hearts rejoice,
Until all bond are free,
Loosed in thy victory.

Hark! in unbuilded spires
Bells chime! and unborn choirs,
Tuned to a later fame,
Still breathe and bless thy name!

LOVE AND LIFE.

LIFE is like a stately temple
That is founded in the sea,
Whose uprising fair proportions
Penetrate immensity;
Love the architect who builds it, —
Building it eternally.

To me, standing in the Present,
As one waits beside a grave,
Up the aisles and to the altar
Rolls the Past its solemn wave,
With a murmur as of mourning
Undulating in the nave.

Pallid phantoms glide around me
In the wrecks of hope and home;
Voices moan among the waters;
Faces vanish in the foam:
But a peace divine, unfailing,
Writes its promise in the dome.

Cold the waters where my feet are
But my heart is strung anew,
Tuned to hope's profound vibration,
Pulsing all the ether through,
For the seeking souls that ripen
In a patience strong and true.

Hark! the all-inspiring Angel
Of the Future leads the choir:
All the shadows of the temple
Are illumed with living fire,

And the bells above are waking
Chimes of infinite desire.

For the strongest or the weakest
There is no eternal fall:
Many graves and many mourners,
But, at last, the lifted pall!
For the highest and the lowest
Blessed life containeth all.

O thou fair unfinished temple!
In unfathomed sea begun,
Love, thy builder, shapes and lifts thee
In the glory of the sun;
And the builder and the builded,
To the pure in heart, are one.

THE FACTORY-BOY.[1]

"COME, poor child!" say the Flowers;
"We have made you a little bed;
Come, lie with us in the showers
The summer-clouds will shed.
Don't work for so many hours:
Come hither and play instead!"
"Come!" whispers the waving Grass:
"I will cool your feet as you pass;
The Daisies will cool your head."

And "Come, come, come!" is sighing
The River against the wall;

[1] From "Where is the Child?" in Harper's.

But "Stay!" in grim replying,
The wheels roar over all.
By hill and field and river,
That hold the child in thrall,
He sees the long light quiver,
And hears faint voices call.

Bright shapes flit near in numbers;
They lead his soul away:
"Oh, hush, hush, hush! he slumbers!"
He dreams he hears them say.

And, just for one strained instant,
He dreams he hears the wheels,
But smiles to feel the flowers,
And down among them kneels.
Over his weary ankles
A rippling runlet steals,

And all about his shoulders
The daisies dance in reels.

Up to his cheeks and temples
Sweet blossoms blush and press,
And softest summer zephyrs
Lean o'er in light caress.
Sleep in her mantle folds him
As shadows fold the hill,
Deep in her trance she holds him,
And the great wheels are still!

THE NEMESIS OF LUXURY.

O DEAF and blind! in ships of ease,
Launched gayly o'er wreck-thickened seas,
Disporting in an irised froth
O'er waves that moan of wrong, —
What curse will rend your fatal sloth,
And break your idle song?

Oh, hear, beneath the ebb and flow,
The long-complaining surge of woe! —
"*Why* are *we* sunk in deeps of care,
While you ride free and safely there?
Why are our lives but waves, to feel
While they support your grooving keel?"

O reckless voyagers, beware!
Thy festal ships are frail,
And voices of unheeded prayer
Lurk thick in every sail.
The shroudless shadows of the tide,
Sad phantoms of the long-denied,
Surround thee, gaunt and pale;
And Nemesis leans down the air
To drive the coming gale.

Too long, too lightly, on the breast
Of boundless agonies
Ye eat and drink, and sink to rest
In languid ecstasies.
Why does it yawn beneath thee so?
Too late thy startled cries:
"Woe to the negligent of woe!"
The goaded Sea replies.

It whelms thee by a simple creed,
Of worth in faultless eyes, —
"In disregard of any need
The guilt of safety lies."

IN THE GARDEN.

THERE are white lilies in the garden,
White-blooming, sweets breathing, close to the gate:
Their glimmer, I thought, was her raiment,
Last night when I came by so late.
As a spring bubbles up in a wood athirst,
My heart began beating as it would burst;
And breathless I called through the darkness
To my darling, "Oh, wait for me!—wait!"

But she was not there: in her window
Was the changing of shadow and light;

And my thoughts knelt down with veiled faces
By her bed, and wished her good-night.

That was but yesterday, and it seems —
It seems such an infinite time ago!
For to-night, when she stood at the gate, —
The red garden-roses were all in blow,
And the tall lilies were full of dew,
And the deepening dusk embowered us two,
Kindly enclosed us from every eye;
We were not shamed by the seeing sky, —
I bent down in the soft air that blew,
Full of the flutter of folding wings of birds
And murmuring plash of streams, from the south,
And kissed the sweet woman I love on her sweet mouth.
And before the kiss, if I uttered words,

I cannot remember: they had no place
In that first full moment of love's embrace.
Does the wave recall that it foamed before
In its flood-tide throb on the waiting shore?

But, under the trees, I remember this,—
My hand, pushing back the leaves, touched a cheek
That bloomed at my touch; and after that kiss
She turned, sweetly trembling: she did not speak,
But raised her clear eyes, that I might see
My heaven in their loving trust in me.

We did not feel the sacred moments pass:
A wide cloud rose and curtained all the sky,
And dimmed the daisies in the long cool grass:
We heard, but could not see, the swallow fly,

And soon were hidden from each other's eye,
So dark it grew; but I could feel the beat
Of her true heart with mine in rhythm sweet,
And so, not seeing, knew my love was nigh.

THE BLIND MAN'S SIGHT.[1]

THE blind man sees a world more fair
Than unsealed eyes behold:
A bluer sky, a softer air,
Its visioned scenes infold.

Its calm delight his bosom fills;
He is a dweller there:
He builds upon its misty hills
His castle in the air.

He slumbers in its fragrant vale,
Lulled by its winding stream,

[1] From "The Springfield Republican."

While Memory's phantoms, sweet and pale,
Glide through his tender dream;

Or, waking, wanders 'neath the shade,
Where blooms of bending trees
Shake perfumes through the odorous glade
To wind-harp melodies.

Through tinted aisles of air his gaze
Is fixed, where mountains rise
Beneath his castle, fringed with rays
Of purpled evening skies.

And oft, its mystic threshold crost,
There greet him voices rare:
'Tis peopled with the loved and lost,—
His castle in the air.

MAUD'S ANSWER.

"YOUR beautiful Maud is fancy-free,
And she will toy with a loving heart"
So spake my sister, warning me—
"Just as she plucks a rose apart."

I kissed my sister; for she is kind,
And loves me: but, as we reached the gate,
I turned, and told her I had a mind,
Nevertheless, to try my fate.

"O brother! she's cruel as fair: take care!"
"Sister, I may be foolish and blind"—

"And the rich man's son is wooing there;"
"But — woman knoweth not woman's mind."

Cruel and fair! take care, take care!
Inward echoes like birds kept singing.
Across, through the shimmering summer-air,
I could see Maud's hammock swinging.

"I will tell her the truth, and take her word;
I will not vex her with lover's sighing,"
I said to myself as I stood by Maud
Like a flower in her hammock lying.

She looked at me gravely with lovely eyes;
Then their falling lashes swept her cheek,
Where a flickering bloom began to rise;
But she did not smile, and she did not speak.

"I am poor, and I love thee!" The tone was bold,
For my heart beat strong with the truth unsaid;
But after, in face of my secret told,
I had not courage to lift my head.

She stayed the hammock with one white hand:
I saw her little feet touch the ground:
I felt her come, and close to me stand;
And the earth and the sky wheeled round and round.

From her lap the roses fell at my feet:
I could feel the waft of her fragrant breath;
The sense of her nearness was strange and sweet
As the fulness of Life and the trance of Death.

Then, whether with hope or whether with dread,
My strength came back with a leaping thrill:
Though my lips were close to her drooping head,
I would not move till I knew her will.

"The household art is the only dower
I can bring, save myself, to him I wed:
Canst thou find the roof, and earn the flour?
Then I can make *home*, and sweet white bread.

"Thou art poor, art thou? Yet thou lovest me!"
Her pale face flushed with a burning red:
"Well, Maud is poor, and she loveth thee:
So now we are rich, are we not?" she said,

And faltered, all trembling with love confessed;
And I, with knowing I was so dear,
Trembled, but gathered my rose to my breast;
And Love was answered, and Life was clear.

FLOWER OF MAY?

BENEATH my window stands
A figure fair and slender,
With soft coquettish hands,
And features gay and tender.

Around her naked feet
How freshly starts the grass!
Faint wafts of odors sweet
Are in the airs that pass.

Her cheek is touched with flame
As I push up the glass,

And whisper down, "Your name,
My captivating lass?"

"My name is April, sir; and I
Often laugh, as often cry;
And I cannot tell what makes me:
Only as the fit o'ertakes me
I must dimple, smile, and frown,
Laughing, though the tears roll down.
But 'tis nature, sir, not art;
And I'm happy at my heart.

"Now, sir, if your toilet's made,
May I ask your company
To the blooming mornlit glade?"
Frank and modest little maid,
With a pretty white and red
Playing chase
O'er her face

At the sweet bold thing she said!
"May I ask your company?
I know where the flowers lie hid
'Neath the forest's brown eyelid, —
Some for you, and some for me."

So I followed her, and saw
All the frosty earth in thaw
Quickening underneath her tread;
While the countless buds o'erhead,
Dipping down the beamy air,
Blushed against her shining hair.

Then spoke April, soft and shy,
Casting down her dewy eye: —
"There's one trick I love to play
On my brilliant sister May.
There's one flower she calls her own;
Thinks it blooms for her alone;

Calls it by her name: yet she
Owes that little flower to me.
Flower of May!
Prove what I say.

"Was it May's or April's breath
Waked you from a winter's death;
Made your veins and fibres dance
To electric touch and glance?
Was it May's or my caress
Stirred you into loveliness?
May is coming, April's going;
Tell the secret of your blowing:
Quickly say, —
Yea or Nay."

April ceased, — a farewell grace
On her tearful smiling face.

Then a very tiny creature,
Exquisite in form and feature,
  Suddenly before us stood,
Mantled like an elfin queen
In a glistening robe of green
  In the bosom of the wood;
With her face, just touched with color
Through the mist of dew upon it,
  Peeping from a pink silk hood,
Like a floral wee Maud Muller,
In the coyest cottage bonnet,
  In a merry, morning mood.

Fluttering her fragrant head,
Thus the little crcature said: —

"People call me 'Flower of May;'
But it is not truth they say:

April's fingers, light and bold,
Found me in the leafy mould;
Fed me, morning, noon, and night,
Choicest bits of spring delight.
Thirst could never parch the lip
Having April's tears to sip.
Of her smile she made a lamp
For my toilet in the damp;
And each morn her warm caress
Wrought new beauties in my dress.
She did all the work: the play
And reward are given to May.

"People say I'm passing fair:
Tell them it is April's care
Nursed me into graces rare.
Many call me, far and near,
Sweetest flower of all the year:

Tell them April's smile and tear
Made me hardy, made me sweet"—

"Hush!" sighed April: "May's light feet
Glow along the forest way:
I can see her flowing hair
Shedding blossoms on the air.
Shut your eyes, my darling! seem—
Never mind what people say—
First to waken from your dream
At the laughing voice of May."

THE SILENT ANSWER.[1]

UNDER the skies of May,
Out of the smiling day,
Into the shadows gray,
Must she be borne away!
  Will it not grieve her?
Nay; for her rest is sweet:
Death's wondrous winding-sheet,
Peace, in a calm complete,
Shrouds her from brow to feet.
  Earth will receive her,
E'en as a mother's breast
Shelters her babe to rest;

[1] From "The Christian Intelligencer."

Nor will Death's lovely guest,
Passed beyond human quest,
Know that we leave her.

Birds in a blithesome throng
Flit the sweet airs along,
Swing the green leaves among,
Sing: will she hear the song
Whither we take her?
Nay! ours to hear and weep:
She doth but gently keep
Silence in calm so deep:
No music thrills her sleep;
Nothing can wake her.

Where many graves are old,
Unto the sunbeam's gold
Yonder, strange hands have rolled

Upward the fragrant mould, —
Last couch to make her.
Ye in the graves grown old,
Tell us, — we must be told,
Ere that dark bed infold, —
Will she not feel the cold,
Feel we forsake her?

Nay! 'tis not she who lies
Dumb to our tears and sighs,
Tranced in Death's mysteries,
Seeming, with veilèd eyes,
Sleep-overtaken:
Earth claims of our distress
Only the precious dress,
Guise of her loveliness,
Sainted by love's caress,
Early forsaken.

Since she has cast it by,
Suffer her robe to lie,
Earth-wrapt from burning sky,
Hid from love's yearning eye,
  Under green mazes,
There to be wrought anew,
Subtly, with sun and dew
Thrilled from the heavenly blue, —
Richly, of vernal hue,
  Broidered with daisies.
There will the tender spring
Yearly come blossoming;
Birds will delay and sing;
Beauty o'er every thing
  Weave her fair phases;

Through the rent veil of night,
Mist-robed in red and white,

Day, like a Peri bright,
Kiss the young earth to light;
  Freshly the clover,
Field-star, and buttercup
Lift their glad faces up;
Millions of insects sup,
Each from his fragrant cup,
  All the earth over.

. . . . . .

Vain seems the daily care,
Vain the long-baffled prayer,
Lost in responseless air:
  Will she not hear us?
Ere yet the lamps illume,
Enters the twilight gloom
Of our too quiet home,
  Hovering near us.

Something we do not name,
Scarce thinking whence it came,
Swift-flowing as a flame,
  Holds us intently;
Stands in our midst, and sighs
Softly, — her deep, glad eyes,
Full of solved mysteries,
  Fixed on us gently.

Till the enshadowed place,
As with a lily's grace,
Shines with her shining face,
  Faith to us giving;
Vision intense of her,
Nothing gone hence of her,
Full, serene sense of her,
  Loving and living!

MORNING.

'Tis early morning, and receding night
Leaves dimly burning in the southern sky
The airy crescent of the summer moon,
The misty lustre of one lingering star.
Thin clouds, the tintless heralds of the dawn,
Come trooping noiseless, wafted from the west:
Pale flames of amber, in uncertain gleams,
Reveal these shadowy Ariels as they glide
To tip the golden turrets of the east.
From the green leaves that rustle near the sill
Now rise the first sweet arias of the birds,
And gentlest murmurs of the breeze complete

The early harmony. The violets lie
Dew-pearled in purple clusters in the grass;
In splendor glows the fragrant rose of June;
And in the odorous silence of the wood
The stream is luminous with lilies, sweet
As a young maiden's bosom, chaste and fair.
No sound of human life as yet; but Earth,
In thousand flutters of coy waking, seems
Aware from mountain-top to far recess
Of her lord's coming; and to his grand brow
And beaming eye she yields well pleased her charms
Of dew and song, and breath of balmy blooms,
The first, fresh, tender grace of early morn.

KATIE, THE BELLE OF GLENCO'.

HAVE you ever seen Katie,
The belle of Glenco'?
She has witching black eyes,
That puzzle one so!
With round glowing cheeks,
And long glossy hair,
And lips that pout, "Kiss me,
Young man, if you dare!"

The youth of Glenco' were deeply in love
With this dark-eyed, insnaring coquette;
But she smiled and she frowned,
Tapped her foot on the ground,

And then, with a toss of her beautiful head
At all the fine things her lover had said,
She blushingly murmured, "Not yet."

O beautiful Katie,
I pray you beware!
"Not yet!" "Not yet?"
Ah! Katie, take care!
You never have met
Young Robin Adair.

In the mellow dusk of the even
She stood by her blind mother's chair,
With her little hands meekly folded,
And her round arms dimpled and bare;
And she spoke with a timid accent,
A shy and maidenly air, —
"I think I should like, dear mother,
To marry young Robin Adair."

In the pale moonlight, by the well,
She stood with Robin Adair,
And blossoms of purple and gold
Were looped in her braided hair.
"I have been wayward and wild,"
She said with a womanly air·
"But I repent of my pride;
And I love you, Robin Adair."

MOTHER'S WINTER-NIGHT SONG.

SLEEP, my babe, my darling, — sleep and rest,
Warmly folded to my breast.
Though the night-wind blows,
And the still, white snows
Fill the robin's empty nest,
Sleep, my babe, my darling, — sleep and rest.

Gentle slumber parts thy dewy mouth:
Far away in bloomy South
Little robin red
Trills, and turns his head;
But thy song's as sweet, little dewy mouth,
Warm thy nest, as robin's in the South.

MY FATHER'S HOUSE.

It stands in the great city's midst, and from its swelling dome
The quivering tongues of swaying bells bid all the people "Home!"
Its portals tremble with strong thrills of organ-peal and song;
Its windows gaze like burning eyes upon the gathering throng
That fill to crimson altar and to the carven door,
As all the nations of the earth across its threshold pour.

Rich garments softly rustle, faint perfumes stir
the air,
As the multitudes lean forward, joining mutely
in the prayer.
And, after prayer, the Preacher, in raiment un-
defiled,
Tells in gentle accents the sweet story of the
Child ;
And suddenly uplooking with fixed and glowing
eyes,
And white hands clasped and lifted, he passion-
ately cries, —
"Oh, hear the children, the little children, cry-
ing on a heathen strand!
The naked, homeless, Christless wanderers in a
godless land!
Stretch out your hands, my brothers, from your
plenty freely give,

That these lost lambs of the Father's may freely eat and live!"
And, while he speaks, the children, too near him for his search,
With pale and hollow faces fill the shadow of the church:
The foul and stainful ripple creeping from the hut and slum
Reaches to the holy threshold, and refuses to be dumb.

The great doors swing gently outward,
And a little child comes in,
Up the shining marble pathway
Gliding, woful, dark, and thin,
Till his footsteps flag and falter,
Failing wholly at the altar,
Where he sinks with struggling sighs;

Thence lifts hollow, burning eyes
To the Preacher, to the Teacher,
Who is surely good and wise.

Every sin seemed to have touched the little creature,
Every sorrow to have crowded in his breast;
Every want had pinched and drained each tiny feature;
All of burden on his puny shoulders pressed.
Nor wave nor glisten in his faded hair,
Nor smile nor dimple in his ashen face,
Nor sign of childhood in his lifeless air,
Nor dim suggestion of its simple grace;
But from the deep eyes, darkening, lifted, wild,
Outraged — commanding answer — looks the child!

A glory as of whitest flame shines down the
scene's cold splendor;
From far-off celestial chorus drops a voice
divinely tender,—
As of "harpers harping with their harps" in
heavenly sweet accord,
By river of the wave of life, the "new song"
to the Lord,
Of when the "former things" shall pass, and
there be "no more sea,"—
"Whoso receiveth one of these, the same
receiveth Me."

The Preacher hears no hapless children weep;
For him no heavenly voice descends the air.
He thinks, "I will go home, and sup and sleep,"
And runs a languid hand through scented
hair,

(He has a home, a supper, and a bed;
The child — he has not where to lay his head!)
The while the congregation rustles forth,
And curves about him at the altar-stair.

The meagre child arises. With his hands upon his breast
He walks up to the Preacher, drawing nearer than the rest;
And in a voice of thunder, if they had ears to hear,
From lips that trembling sunder, this question cometh clear: —

"*Whose house is this?* I prithee, tell."
And sweeter than with silvern bell
The fretted nave is thrilled;

But no one hears, no one replies,
Though all the air is filled.
Once more he lifts the childlike eyes:—
"I, passing, weary, heard my name;
And I was glad, and hither came.
Where is your Host? He knoweth me;
I am His favorite guest:
And, tired and hungry, sweet will be
The bread He brake and blest!

. . . . . .

"I thought this was my Father's house;
But now, its threshold crossed,
I see it cannot be His house
Wherein His child is lost!
It was my Father's house; for here
A little Child once said,—
'Come, hungry, burdened, sorrowing world,
Be comforted and fed.'

"It was my Father's house; but now —
His homeless children cry
And starve unheeded at the doors
Where thieves fare sumptuously!
For distant woes, with seas between,
Ye have a generous word;
While at your very feet, unseen,
Want wails, and is not heard.

"And your own children's faces speak
(A tale ye will not hear)
The language of the little graves
That gather year by year,
Of little hearts crushed all too soon
To know or breathe a curse;
But, ah! their dumb, swift death for you
Shall be so much the worse!

"Now unto deaf and blind they pray;
But ye will hear and see,
When, in the great awakening day,
My Father asks for me!"

FAITH.

WHAT shalt thou sing, O Soul! gifted with song;
To whom, therefore, the pain and joy belong?
Sit with thine ear to that great world of sound
That rolls between the silences profound.
Thou hearest Science crying loud and far,—
"I find the deepest pearl; on farthest star
I lay my certain finger; all is mine:
I am the true, the only, the divine."
Reason, born blind, doth (sitting unaware
Upon the "mountain's secret top") declare,—

"That which I see I know, and that alone:
There is no hidden sermon in the stone."
While Faith, deep-eyed as Love, with noiseless key
Opens the unsuspected heaven to thee.

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LITTLE MARTIN CRAGHAN . . .	*Harper's Magazine.*
LOVE'S HOME	" "
THE CHILDREN'S NIGHT . . .	" "
THE PRISONER	" "
THE LYRIC OF THE LILIES . .	" "
HARP OF THE NORTH. . . .	" "
ON THE SANDS	" "
THE VOICE OF CHRISTMAS PAST .	" "
EVENING HYMN TO WHITTIER . .	*Boston Globe.*
LOVE AND LIFE	*Harper's Magazine.*
THE FACTORY-BOY	" "
THE NEMESIS OF LUXURY . . .	" "
IN THE GARDEN	" "
THE BLIND MAN'S SIGHT . . .	*Springfield Republican.*
MAUD'S ANSWER	*Harper's Weekly.*
FLOWER OF MAY?	*Harper's Bazar.*
THE SILENT ANSWER	*Christian Intelligencer.*
MORNING	*Woman's Journal.*
KATIE, THE BELLE OF GLENCO' .	*Home Journal.*
MOTHER'S WINTER-NIGHT SONG .	*Boston Commonwealth.*
MY FATHER'S HOUSE	*Harper's Magazine.*
FAITH	" "

NOTES FOR REFERENCE TO BRYANT'S POEMS.

Page 70. See "*Waterfowl.*" See "*Sella,*" seventy-third line.

" 71. See "*Rivulet.*"

" 72. See "*Ages,*" third and fourth lines. See "*West Wind,*" which mentions the "ring-dove," and styles the west wind "wind of joy and youth and love."

" 73. See poem "*June,*" — mentions butterfly, housewife-bee, and humming-bird.

" 74. See "*Thanatopsis.*"

" 76. See "*White-footed Deer.*" See "*Robert o' Lincoln.*"

" 77. See "*Innocent Child and Snow-white Flower.*"

" 78. See "*Fringed Gentian.*"

" 80. See "*Little People of the Snow.*" See "*Flood of Years.*"

" 81. See "*Flood of Years.*"

" 82. See "*Massacre at Scio.*" See last lines of "*Conjunction of Jupiter and Venus.*"

" 83. See "*Romero.*" See "*Italy.*"

" 84. See "*Ages,*" thirty-fourth verse. See "*Flood of Years.*"